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THE SITES, SOFTWARE, HARDWARE, AND PEOPLE

AWARDS 2001

Over 100 million sites whittled down to the best 18

ARE YOU READY TO GO WIRELESS?
We unveil the new mobile Internet

THE GOOD NET GAMING GUIDE
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ON TEST!
OPEN ALL HOURS
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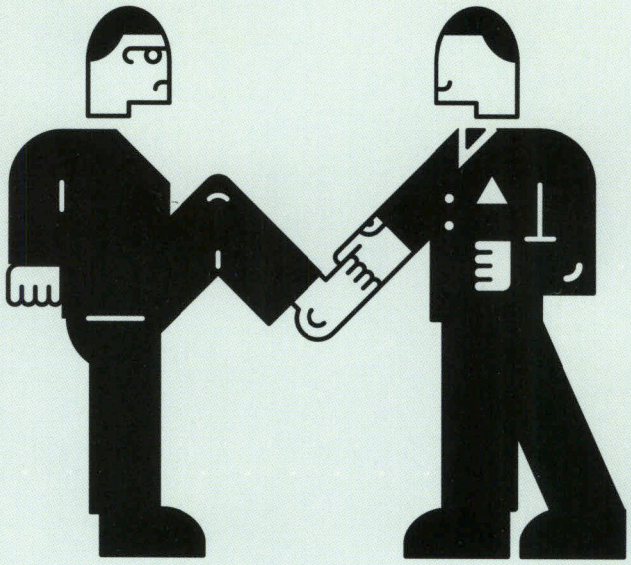
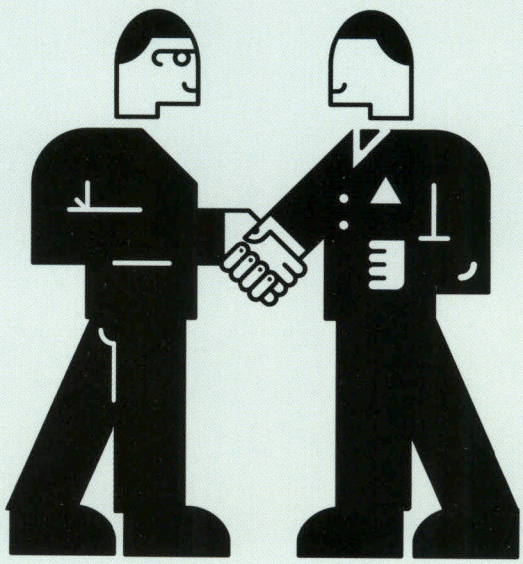


No. That's a leg.



That's it. Now you can get acquainted.

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ESSENTIALS

ABOUT US»

We're sworn to saving you time and money by bringing you the best of the Internet every month – and giving technical advice that will make mastering the Net cheaper and easier.

CONTACT US»

GROUP EDITOR Mark Payton
mark.payton@haynet.com
DEPUTY EDITOR Robert Jeffery
robert.jeffery@haynet.com
WHAT WEBSITE? EDITOR
Gary Parkinson
gary.parkinson@haynet.com
STAFF WRITER Alex Newby
alex.newby@haynet.com
ART EDITOR Paul Yelland
paul.yelland@haynet.com
PICTURE EDITOR
Richard Lawrence
richard.lawrence@haynet.com
DEPUTY ART EDITOR
Anthony Moore
JUNIOR DESIGNER
Matthew Southall
CHIEF SUB-EDITOR
Claire McHattie
SUB-EDITOR Jennifer Kearns

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Got a technical query? Call *the net* helpline on 020 8267 5933 between 2pm and 5pm each Thursday for one-on-one advice, or send an email to ***thenetnow@haynet.com*** for a written reply.

TO ADVERTISE»

AD MANAGER Jason Dear
jason.dear@haynet.com
CLASSIFIED SALES Gurbir Phull
gurbir.phull@haynet.com
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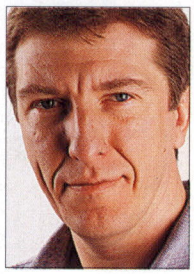
:-) ED'S COMMENT

'Twelve million Britons ditch Internet' shocker



The Internet's dead. Finished. Over with. The nation's landfill sites are struggling to cope with the influx of discarded PCs, rejected by broken-hearted Web fanatics. All online shopping has ceased, and email is a redundant form of communication. And my Aunt Hilda is running in the 4.15 at Kempton.

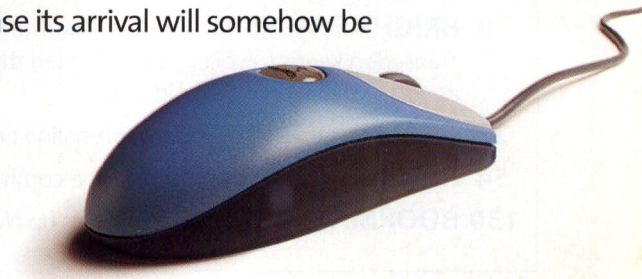
Were you to believe the recent national press coverage of the Net, the above would seem perfectly feasible (Aunt Hilda aside). It's not so much a case of history being rewritten as reality overlooked in the name of a story. Over 12 million surfers in Britain? Irrelevant. Over 9.6 million individuals per month using MSN's home page? They obviously stumbled across it by accident while walking to the shops.

Fact is, most of the dot coms that took the Big Fall deserved it. Their business models were often shocking, and the only insanity is that they were ever granted venture capital in the first place.

But after the inevitable cull, what remains is as compelling as ever. Sites are launching or improving every day, while a recent survey put an estimate of $1.7 trillion on online shopping by 2003.

And, in judging our Awards this year (see page 33), the arguments were as heated as ever. Yes, you would expect us to be passionate, but the process of debating the pros and cons of contenders only highlighted how far some have come.

Now we're just a stone's throw away from the launch of a workable, always-on mobile Internet (see page 116), a development that can only refuel the Web's attraction for those who have become a little jaded. Unless, of course, they're scribbling for the national press, in which case its arrival will somehow be contrived to mark the end of the world...



Mark Payton, **EDITOR**
mark.payton@haynet.com

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Broadband boosts the realistic violence quota of online gaming. Now, that's what we call progress…

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Trolley rage, supermarket queues and lugging heavy shopping indoors can be things of the past when you buy your groceries online. But are the online retailers up to it? Read our Supermarket Site Supertest and find out who takes top honours

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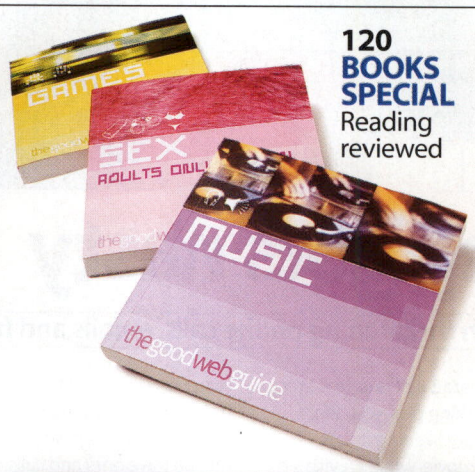

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Online gaming gets nasty

This time it's personal, complete with threatening phone calls, emails and faxes

The future of online gaming has arrived – and it looks decidedly ugly.

Majestic, currently being launched in the US by Electronic Arts, is a 100 percent Internet-based game that has critics and industry insiders in a spin and looks set to revolutionise gaming. So frenzied was anticipation of the game that a network of fan sites had sprung up before full details were available.

Majestic (**majestic.ea.com**) is an *X-Files*-style tale of conspiracies and governmental cover-ups in which you play an unwitting participant who stumbles across a complex web of subterfuge. The beauty of it is that the game works in real time, effectively taking over your life. Developers are likening it to a Hollywood movie, while EA vice president Neil Young says: 'We want *Majestic* to play you just as much as you want to play it.'

Majestic unfolds in episodes and you need to log on for at least 10 minutes a day to watch. The game continues through your fax machine (if you have one) and calls: menacing actor-recorded messages are phoned through to you, your loved ones are threatened (if you've been naive enough to hand over their details) and clues are left for you on sites and in your inbox.

Majestic: where paranoia is fun

EA has gone even further: it's bought hundreds of company names and phone numbers, and set up fake news sites, so players don't know if they're involved in the game or not. Is that news story you've just been linked to part of *Majestic* or a real event? Is the 'company' sending you suspicious parcels a genuine operation or a front?

It's all possible thanks to a new 'platform' designed by EA. In short, it's a small download you leave running on the desktop. Input your email address, phone, fax and mobile and the fun starts.

It doesn't come cheap: the first episode costs nothing, but once you're hooked it's $10 a month to carry on. You can choose your own level of involvement (faxes and phone calls are optional and for over-18s only) and suspend the game at any point to pick up later.

Dozens of fan sites and message boards are already buzzing with conspiratorial whisperings. If initial take-up of the game is encouraging, a UK version may be developed, and there are rumours of a film and TV series spin-off. *Quake* is starting to look positively pedestrian.

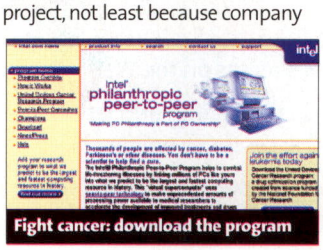
Screensaver lifesaver

Oxford boffins and computer giant Intel have got together to fight cancer – and you can help by downloading a special screensaver.

Scientists at the University have developed a tool called Think which uses the estimated 80 percent idle time on home and office PCs to carry out molecular research.

To kill a virus or block a tumour, a molecule of a drug has to lock in to a human protein; drugs can be tested as 3D shapes on a computer screen, but there are 250 million molecules to check. You can do your bit by downloading the program from **www.intel.com/cure**. It just sits quietly on your desktop, trying out different combinations and reporting any useful findings to the Oxford team.

Intel has got right behind the project, not least because company chief Craig Barrett's son and grandson are both fighting cancer.



Fight cancer: download the program

A similar screensaver works to find AIDS-fighting drugs. PC users can find it at **www.fightaidsathome.org**.

The use of peer-to-peer software to search for needles in haystacks was first used two years ago by SETI to analyse radio signals from space. Since then, 2.9 million users have donated more than 600,000 *years* of computer time.

PICTURES: CORBIS

Subscribe to MusicNet to download the likes of Madge

KNOWHOW THE INSTANT EXPERT GUIDE

No.23: Duet

Jayne MacDonald and Handy Andy to wrap their tonsils around a camp disco classic?
Oh no, this is a service with serious musicians doing serious music. Although Jayne and Andy might find their way there if they sign to Vivendi Universal or Sony Music Entertainment, two of the world's largest recording groups.
And how does it affect me?
Depends whether or not you intend to listen to music online. Duet is a subscription service launching in the summer which allows users to compile personal playlists and share them with other members.
Sounds not unlike something which rhymes with Mapster.
Yes, but you have to pay.
But Vivendi and Sony are only two of the biggest record companies. What about, say, AOL Time Warner, Bertlesmann and EMI Group?
Too late, mate: they've just launched MusicNet, a separate company using RealNetworks streaming technology to bring the latest tunes to your desktop. But only if you subscribe, of course.
Hang on, hasn't Bertlesmann got into bed with Napster?
Yes, but the German company has signed non-exclusive deals with both. As spokesman Oliver Herggesell says, 'We want to have our content everywhere.'
Anyone else selling their wares all over the place?
Fellow MusicNet member EMI is licensing its music library to HitHive, a startup which provides tune 'lockers'; a tune is available to 25 people via MP3 phones up to 10 times, after which it's blocked. It's the first file-sharing move by a major record company, and it's also a smart foot in the MP3-phone door.
Is this good news for me, then?
Well, not as good as Napster being given carte blanche to carry on, but it's not bad news. The more competition there is for subscribers, the lower the subscription price is likely to be. And the competition is hotting up every day.

End of your tether?

the net helpline is available for all software, hardware, ISP and technical enquiries. Lines are open on Thursdays from 2pm to 5pm

0208 267 5933

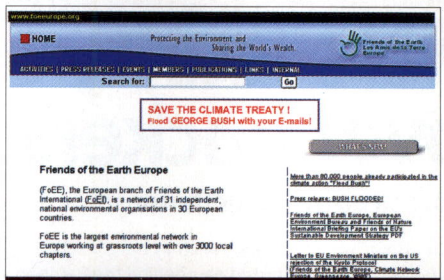
or email thenetnow@haynet.com

NEWS IN BRIEF

FIRST BYTES»

› BITE THE HAND THAT FEEDS

Employees of big oil firms BP and Shell are among the tens of thousands to have emailed the White House in protest at George W Bush's decision to renege on the Kyoto Protocol climate-change treaty. The Flood Bush email campaign, organised by Friends of the Earth (*www.foeeurope.org*), encourages people to email president@whitehouse.gov to protest at Bush's decision not to sign the treaty, which would commit the US to cutting climate-changing gas pollution. The White House server is believed to have stalled under the weight of the 70,000 emails that were sent in the first 10 days of the campaign.



Friends of the Earth: want you to harass Dubya

› GATES GETS IT

You might have thought the emergence of George W Bush would take some of the heat off Bill Gates as a target for scorn, but the Microsoft man has been getting it in the neck again. A teenage hacker from Wales has claimed he hacked Gates' credit card details through Microsoft software and ordered a shipment of Viagra to be sent to Gates' home address. Raphael Gray, of Pembrokeshire, claimed in *The Sun* newspaper that he did it to expose security flaws in Microsoft software (a recent update for Windows 2000 patches up 35 'access violation errors' and 65,000 bugs). In March 2000 Gray allegedly stole information from 26,000 credit card accounts and published the details on the Internet. His home was raided by FBI agents and the British police, and he was charged with 10 counts of downloading unauthorised information.

› ALWAYS DELAYED SLIGHTLY LONGER

Hackers had a whale of a time on April Fools' Day, exposing embarrassing flaws in security on a number of top Web sites. Among the three dozen sites affected were Disney, Wall Street Journal, HSBC, the US Navy and the US Army. Burger King visitors were greeted with 'BK sucks go to McDs!', but many readers may sympathise more with the defacement of bt.search.com. It read: 'So uhm, BT – when will ADSL be available? ...it's been ages now, just gimme a date when it'll be ready why don't ya. Sigh – Always Delayed Slightly Longer.'

› RELAUNCH

Two big online entertainment players, FilmFour.com and Virgin.net, have relaunched. FilmFour has expanded its digital output with the addition of new channels FilmFour Extreme, FilmFour+1 and FilmFour World. It aims to increase interactivity in a bid to become the UK's No.1 film site. Features include *Trailer Park*, offering sneak previews of upcoming movies, and a Flash game in which the player races against time to cast a blockbuster. Virgin.net's relaunch, meanwhile, is a redesign intended to freshen up the site's appeal and make Virgin's myriad services easier to access.

FilmFour.com: new look courts No.1 film site slot

Hackers: the new spies?

National security fears over hackers

Cook and the US lose sleep over cyberterrorism

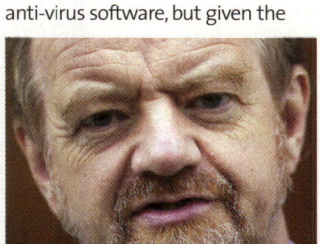
Hackers could cripple Britain faster than a military air strike, Foreign Secretary Robin Cook has warned.

During a Parliamentary debate on the work of the intelligence services, Cook claimed the number of 'national infrastructures' such as water, power and transport that are now controlled by computer rendered hacker activity potentially more damaging than a targeted aerial assault.

Cook praised the efforts of British intelligence in responding to the Kournikova virus in February, when a national alert was issued within one hour. That was a great improvement on Governmental reaction to last May's Love Bug, which infected many Government computers after Whitehall reacted sluggishly.

Cook's fears may have reached interested ears behind the Bamboo Curtain, where China's Ministry of Public Security has been asking for viruses. It now requires any Western anti-virus vendors doing business with Chinese companies to supply samples of malicious code.

The official explanation is that the samples are used to test the anti-virus software, but given the absurdity of that story – why would vendors supply code their goods couldn't cope with? – it's feared that the Chinese are investigating or developing cyber-warfare capacity.


Cook: warning on hacker activities

Back on the home front, *The Observer* recently printed a leaked report to Home Secretary Jack Straw by the deputy director-general of the National Criminal Intelligence Service, which requests the legal right to access records of all phone calls, emails and Internet dial-ups made in the UK for a period of up to seven years. Current legislation only allows research of information more than two years old in the case of suspected murder or terrorism.

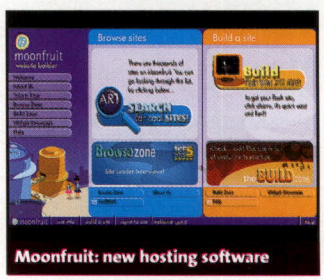
Straw is known to be sympathetic to the idea of increased surveillance, as proven by the RIP Act which allows Government to collect Internet data without permission. It's to be hoped that Jack and Robin don't get together for a panic about cyberterrorism, or the concepts under threat could include privacy, data protection, human rights and presumed innocence.

Pay-as-you-go sites are go

Good news for Webmasters who are getting increasingly hacked off with standing monthly charges: Easily.co.uk has introduced pay-as-you-go hosting accounts to the Internet.

Many consumers pay set fees for Web space, email accounts and data transfer whether these are used or not. Easily's idea lets you buy accounts, space and bandwidth as necessary, and also eliminates the possibility of being closed down for using too much space – an oft-reported crime of several ISPs.

Easily provides a petrol tank-style gauge of how much credit there is left, allowing you to to calculate your requirements for the forthcoming period and top up the credit.



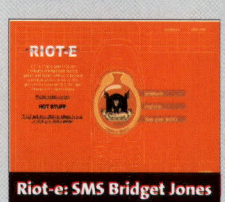
Moonfruit: new hosting software

Meanwhile, leading hosting company Moonfruit (***www.moonfruit.com***) – with whose software *the net* recently built a Web site in half an hour – has announced a search for a buyer. Chief Financial Officer David Stephens revealed to *the net* that Moonfruit has been taken as far as it can be under the present financial arrangement and the sale was in order to allow Moonfruit to develop further. In the meantime, Moonfruit is rolling out a new version of its hosting software which makes it even easier, more functional and more intuitive for users to build their own sites.

WIRELESS WORLD » THE NET IN YOUR POCKET

GPRS ASAP
The mobile phones we'll all be craving by the summer were given a preview at the European tech-fest CebIT. The phones support the new GPRS (general packet radio service) infrastructure that mobile networks are rolling out this summer, along with a promise of super-speedy mobile Internet services. Highlights include Ericsson's T68, the first GPRS phone with a colour screen, and Nokia's funky 8310. For more on GPRS, see our report on p116.

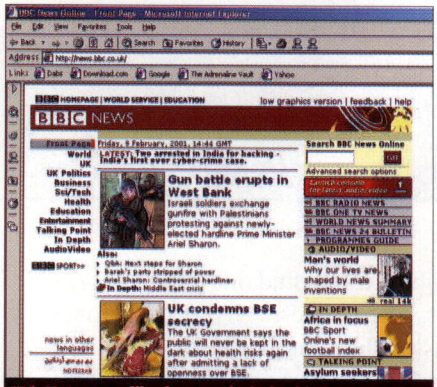
STORM IN A TEACUP
Microsoft has announced plans for a range of business-to-consumer Internet services, dubbed HailStorm. Available wirelessly on anything from a laptop PC to PDA to mobile phone, the services will include calendar management. Sun and AOL are not happy. They claim HailStorm raises anti-competitive issues, as the services would be available only via Microsoft servers.



Riot-e: SMS Bridget Jones

20 MSGS: V V GD
This is v gd news for fans of Bridget Jones. Her creator, Helen Fielding, has teamed up with *www.riot-e.com* to offer a range of SMS services designed to bring the wit, wisdom and neuroses of Ms Jones to your mobile phone. These will include a personality test, quizzes, ringtones, logos and Mentionitis (Bridget quotes and

PICTURES: KOBAL, PA



IE6: Netscape-alike features include side bars on left

Internet Explorer v6 follows Netscape's lead

Want a sneak preview of how your browser could look later this year? If you're feeling brave, back up your data and head to ***www.microsoft.com/downloads***, where you can sample the first public beta version of the forthcoming Internet Explorer 6.

In a similar vein to the rival Netscape 6, IE6 includes a range of new sidebars on the left-hand side of the browser window. These customisable Personal Bars are designed to deliver content such as news headlines from specialised Web sites and give access to Web-based programmes (like the Windows Media Player) without having to open a second window.

Also new is the Contacts Bar, which can display both your local Outlook/Outlook Express email address book and your online MSN Messenger contact list. But early reports suggest that this is the part of IE6 with the most bugs still to iron out.

New security features include virus protection in Outlook Express, support for the P3P privacy standard, and a range of optional privacy and security tabs.

The IE6 beta will only run on Windows 98, Windows NT 4.0 and above, forcing any remaining Windows 95 users to upgrade if they want the new browser.

The finalised version of IE6 will be available, both as a stand-alone browser and as part of the latest version of the Windows operating system, later on this year.

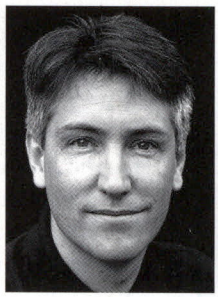
thoughts). 'I have no doubt that after pioneering email flirtation, Bridget has by now become an SMS junkie,' said Ms Fielding.

KICK IN THE 'TOOTH

It seems Microsoft has decided not to include support for wireless comms technology Bluetooth's standard in its revision of Windows XP. Key Bluetooth advocates, including IBM and Toshiba, are believed to be working on the necessary software support themselves.

Jon Casimir

OPINION DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER



Anne has a pierced navel and tattoos of a Jerusalem Cross and Nietzsche's name. Nicholas has tongue, nostril and ear piercings, as well as tattoos of the Egyptian Eye of Ra and the swirly pagan triskelion symbol.Scott boasts a tattoo of the WarnerBros character Marvin the Martian. But what these individuals really have in common is this: they're all librarians. They're cool, they're hip, they're street, they're information professionals.

You will find them online at The Modified Librarian, (***www.bmeworld.com/gailcat***) a site which prides itself in providing 'a forum for the discussion of body modification in the context of librarianship'. After spending an hour on the site, I'm still not exactly sure what that context is, but in this instance, I'm happy to file logic under 'Unnecessary'. So far the ModLib site has 29 separate pages devoted to librarians showing off their tatts and piercings. There's also a series of passionate rants against all those cruel, unthinking people who would stereotype librarians as sensible-shoe-wearing, bun-haired frumps.

They're cool, they're hip, they're street, they're information professionals

Not that there's much chance of that over at The Bellydancing Librarian (***www.sonic.net/~erisw/bdlib.html).*** Eris Weaver says she was inspired to create the site 'because I have met *so* many Bellydancing Librarians that we could start our own interest group'. I've personally have never come across so much as one of these exotic creatures. What a sad and sheltered life I must lead.

Before I go on, I feel I ought to out myself and say that some of my best friends are librarians. Many librarians I've met have been hard-thinking, politically committed people, particularly on censorship issues. Individually and collectively, they have been at the coalface of Internet freedom of speech issues (check out ***www.librarian.net***). That said, I find something amusing about the little network of Web sites dedicated to proving librarians are, you know, funky.

The LipstickLibrarian (***www.teleport.com/~petlin/liplib***) specialises in beauty tips and suggests that the true beating heart of librarianship is glamour. 'She's bold, she's sassy, she's helpful'. She's also probably a man, but that's beside the point. The Laughing Librarian, (***www.laughinglibrarian.com***) meanwhile, pulls together gags, anecdotes and oddball vignettes to help us see that libraries are, despite all that shushing, never-ending laff riots. Elsewhere, the Naked Librarian(***www.jessamyn.com/na>ked.htm***) is a collection of erotic, if not exactly raunchy, bookplates. Phew! What's next, sexyaccountant.com? (Actually that site exists, but it's just another porn outlet).

Perhaps the oddest of the wacky library sites is the AnarchistLibrarians Web (***burn.uscd.edu/~mai/librarians.html***). Is it just me, or is there something mildly oxymoronic about the idea? The revolution, as they say, will be catalogued.

Millionaire: not real money, sadly

Who wants to be an e-millionaire?

ITV has snapped up exclusive UK rights for Net spin-offs from *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*.

Its Web site (**www.itv.co.uk**) will host games, while the cable and digital channel ITV2 has landed the show's interactive TV rights.

Four *WWTBAM?* games will be launched on the ITV site during 2001. A single-player game is already available as *the net* goes to press, which gives players 30 seconds to answer the first nine questions and a full minute for the rest. It also provides mock responses for the Ask The Audience and Phone A Friend lifelines.

The launch of a multiplayer game will allow up to 10 players to compete head-to-head online, while a synchronised version will let surfers compete in real time with on-air contestants. Sadly, if you win, your wealth is only a number on a screen.

Internet radio: just like the real thing, then

Ericsson comes up with the wireless wireless

Ericsson has come up with this the perfect solution for those of us who are hooked on Internet radio stations but don't want to be stuck at a PC all day.

The battery-powered Cordless Internet Radio can be used anywhere within 100m of a Bluetooth adaptor with broadband Internet connection. Shortcut buttons let you browse and select stations and save your favourites.

The radio can access online audio-file archives on the Web or your PC, has built-in stereo speakers, can be connected to your hi-fi and has a headphone socket.

Further details are not available yet, but we look forward to them: we can't wait to listen to *www.intercot.com* – all the sounds of Disney theme parks – in the shower.

Tim Richardson

OPINION WHO YOU CALLING AN INTERNET JUNKIE?

I've just completed a short test to find out whether or not I'm an Internet addict. The 20 questions probed my online habits to see if I'd crossed the boundary between 'average user' and 'boy, have you got problems'.

According to Kimberly Young's book *Caught in the Net*, if I score more than 40 points, I'd be experiencing 'frequent problems because of the Internet' and would have to begin considering its 'full impact on my life'. Any more than 70 points and the book tells me that my Net usage is causing 'significant problems in my life' and I need to get help. Fast. Thankfully, I can report that I am not an Internet addict. In fact, I scored a dismal 27, which put me at the lower end of the not-at-risk category. And I'm happy to report that I never 'fear that life without the Internet would be boring, empty and joyless' and I can honestly say that I have never 'fantasised about being online'. I am simply an 'average online user: you may surf the Web a bit too long at times, but you have control over your usage,' the book tells me reassuringly. Phew! Well, that's a relief.

Some people will think this is a load of old tosh. Addicted to the Net? It's not as if it's a drug or anything

But how do you know if you're a Net junkie or just an enthusiastic Internaut? Well, according to the so-called experts, there are a number of symptoms associated with the disorder which include neglecting your family and shunning social events. Your work or school grades suffer and people begin to tell you that you spend too long online. But that doesn't bother you. For when you're online,you stay there for hours at a time lost in your own world, refusing to log off. And when you do finally pull the plug, you spend the time preoccupied with thoughts about the next time you'll be online. There's mood swings, sleep loss, the breakdown of relationships, denial – the list goes on and on.

Now some people will no doubt think that this is a load of old tosh. Addicted to the Net? It's not as if it's a drug or anything, they say. However, some take it really seriously. For instance, the authorities in Singapore called in psychiatrists to straighten out school children they feared were suffering from Net addiction. And last year a Scandinavian chauffeur was booked into a clinic because he was said to be suffering from SMS (short message services) addiction. Apparently, he was sending up to 200 short text messages a day on his mobile phone, costing him almost £1,000 a quarter.

It seems help is at hand for those who find themselves unable to resist the pleasures of the Web. Indeed, Kimberly Young is a professor of Psychology at the University of Pittsburgh. Her Web site, **www.netaddiction.com** deals with a whole range of Net-related disorders. And what's more, she offers online counselling either by e-mail or in real time via private chat rooms. Snag is, isn't that like holding a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous down the pub?

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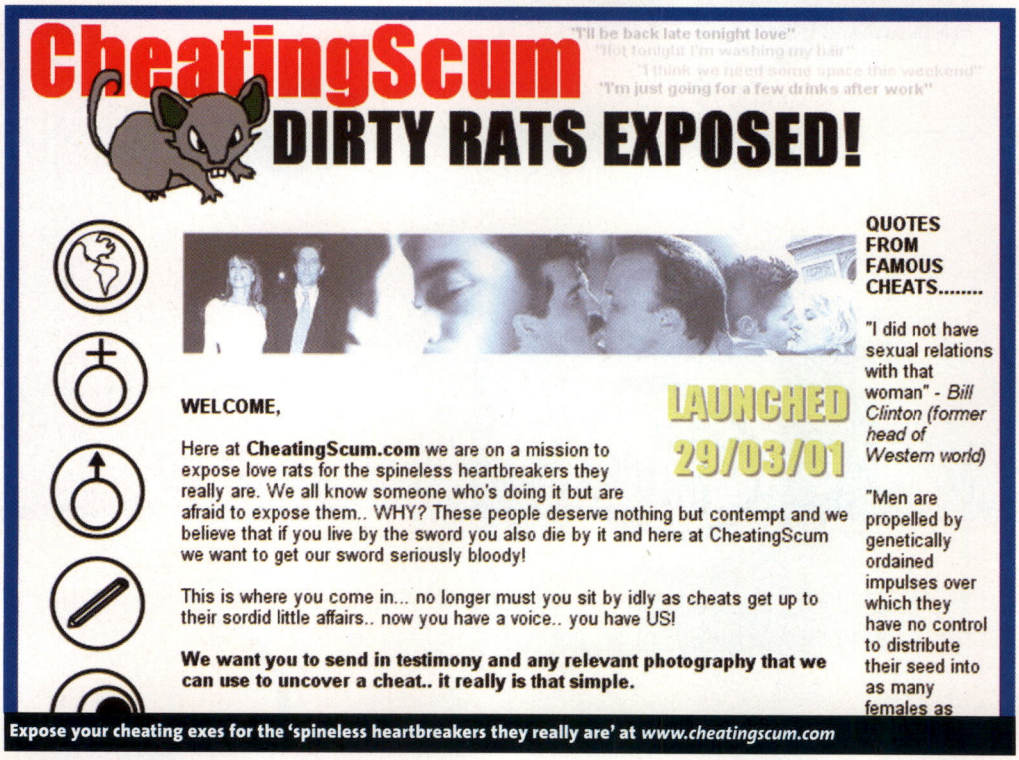
thenetnow»

://Heroes & Zeros – the best and the worst of the Web



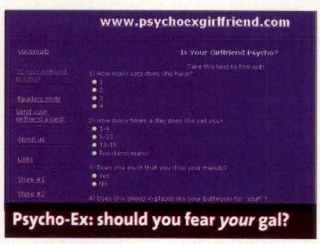
Expose your cheating exes for the 'spineless heartbreakers they really are' at *www.cheatingscum.com*

HERO SCARIEST IDEA

Cheats feel the heat online

BAD NEWS FOR CHEATING PARTNERS – there's no hiding place on the Web.

The folks behind Cheating Scum (***www.cheatingscum.com***) are 'on a mission to expose love rats for the spineless heartbreakers they really are'. On this adulterer's worst nightmare, ex-partners denounce their former lovers in no uncertain terms, posting their names and pictures with caustic comments such as 'he's utterly changed from a fantastic man to a two-faced, manipulative, greedy bastard'.



Psycho-Ex: should you fear *your* gal?

Of course, there is always the chance innocent partners might be shopped – though the site promises to investigate any false postings and remove them.

It seems the online world is intent on revenge: this month also saw the arrival of ***www.psychoexgirlfriend.com***, where a man bombarded by calls from a former lover posted her messages online and attracted 200,000 hits in two days as word spread.

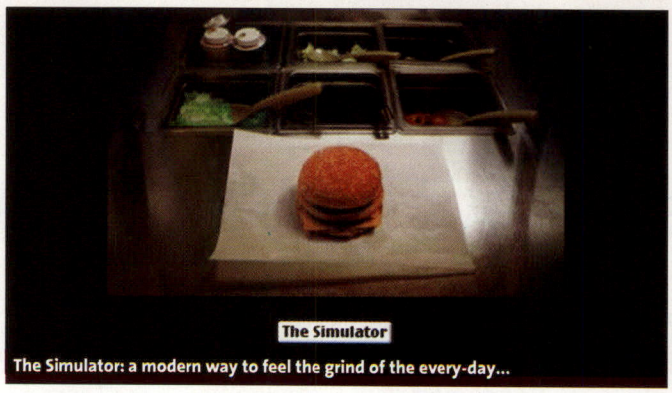
Not everyone gets so lucky, however – a Malaysian man is facing 10 years' jail after posting his estranged wife's details on a sex site. The woman received obscene calls from across the world and called in police, who quickly picked up her hubby...

HERO ODDEST SITE

'Fries with that, Sir?'

ALL OF US SUFFER DAYS WHEN WE don't want to get up and go to work – fortunately, you can now simulate a working day from the comfort of your own desktop thanks to artist Garnet Hertz.

Unfortunately, the workplace in question is the world's most popular fast food chain, but if you don't mind the idea of serving up Big Macs all day, a visit to ***www.conceptlab.com/simulator*** will enable you to put in a hard day's graft for minimum effort.



The Simulator: a modern way to feel the grind of the every-day...

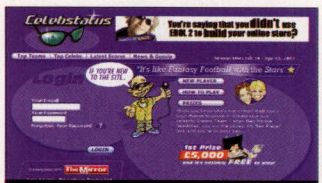
The simulator takes you through the mundane process of getting dressed in the morning, driving to the restaurant and making burgers for hungry customers before you return home to bed – not the most edifying way to spend your day, perhaps, but probably a lot easier than actually getting off your seat and doing it for real...

HERO BEST GAME

'Sign Forsyth! Now!'

AFTER FANTASY FOOTBALL AND fantasy musicians, it was inevitable: fantasy celebrities are the latest big thing.

Celeb Status (***www.celebstatus.com***) lets you pick a team of 10 celebrities from A to C list, using a £35 million transfer kitty. Your team then accrues points according to the number of times each member is mentioned in the press – C-listers



Celeb Status: let the stars work for you

like Esther Rantzen score more when they appear in the tabloids than the likes of Posh Spice, but will be mentioned less often.

So it's worth keeping an eye on the papers for possible upcoming celebs, then adding them to your team: cash prizes at the end of each season add to the general fun. And when we visited, Geri Halliwell was number one – for almost certainly the last time in her career.

Fans of the 'fantasy team' idea can already enjoy following the fortunes of football teams, F1 drivers and cricketers thanks to Dream Shares (***www.dreamshares.com***).

ZERO WORST NEWS

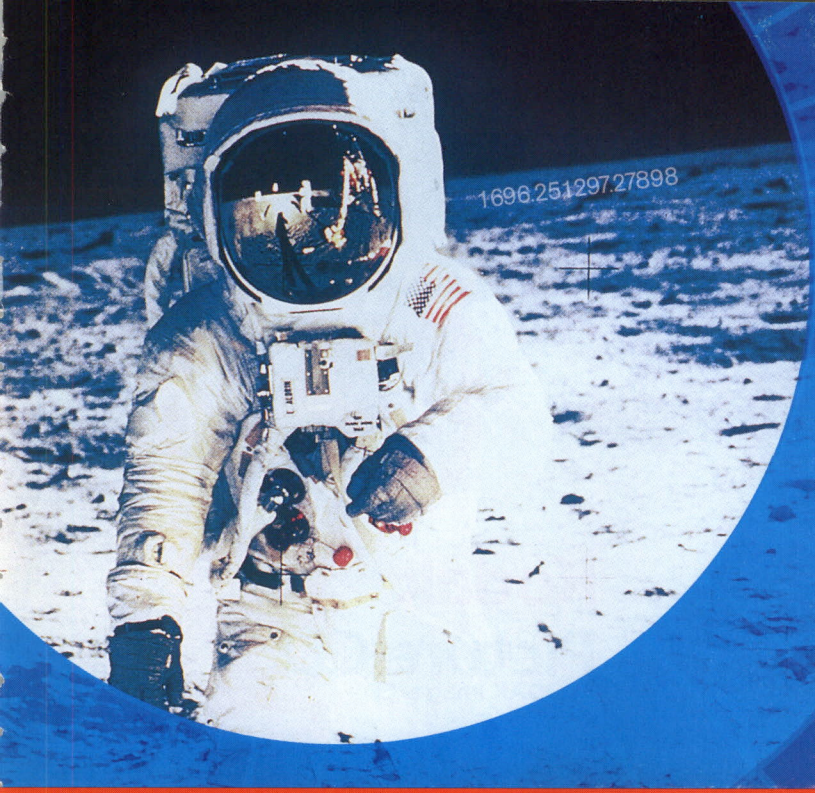
Online 'hit list' is OK, says court

IN WHAT MANY SEE AS A potentially explosive decision, a US court has given the go-ahead to a site which lists details of doctors carrying out abortions.

A group of doctors had taken the site, called The Nuremberg Files, to court after one of its 'targets' was killed by an anti-abortionist – but the Federal Appeals Court cited the first amendment, guaranteeing free speech, in deciding the site could stay open.

One of the judges claimed 'extreme rhetoric and violent action' had always been part of American politics, and that 'if their statements... encouraged unrelated terrorists, their words are protected by the first amendment.'

One of the doctors listed on the site said he feared the ruling would be a 'green light' for violent anti-abortionists. Seven doctors whose details were on the site have been killed, though whether it was as a result of being online is unknown.



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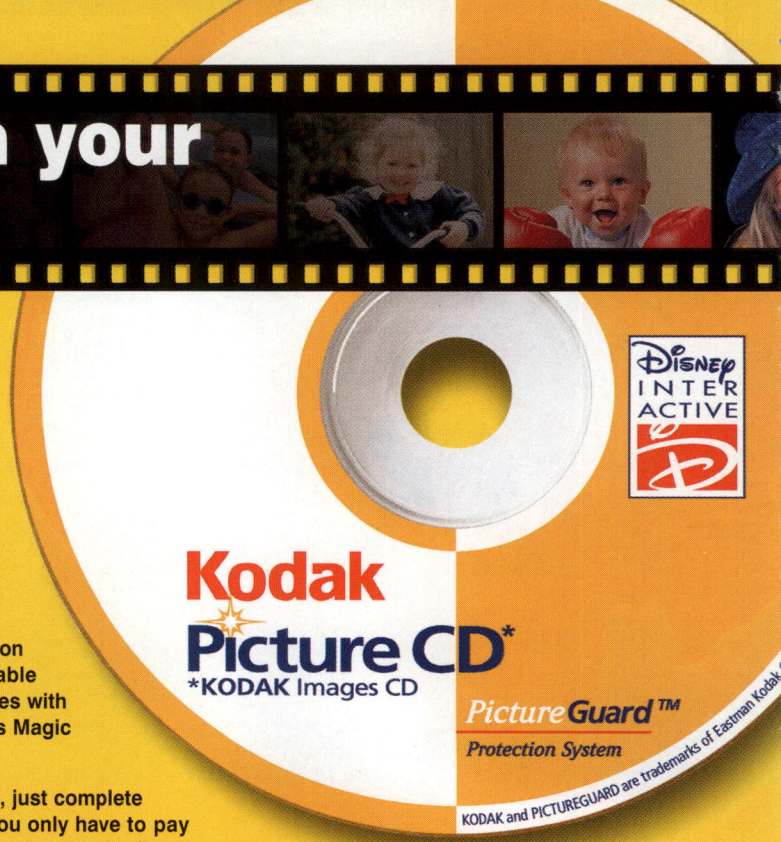

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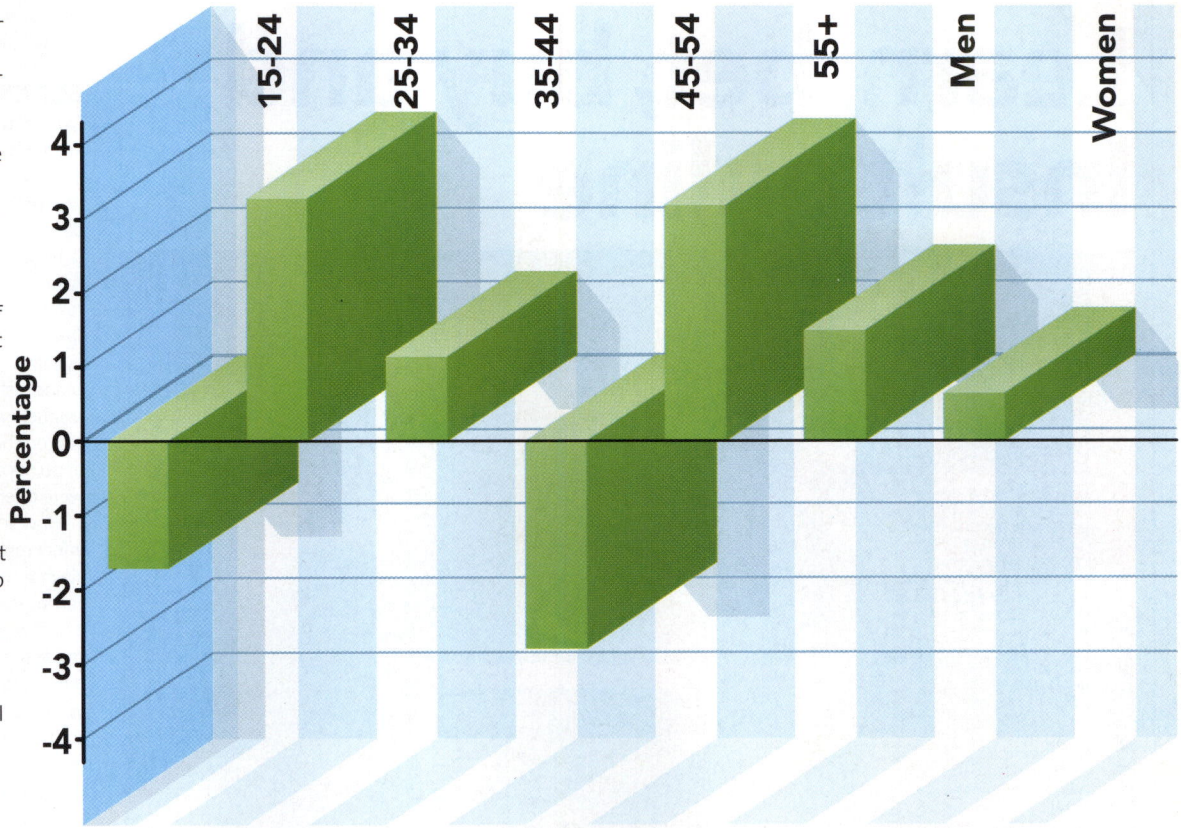
Statattack»

:// The Web in charts and graphs

Silver surfers ride the tide of Internet confidence

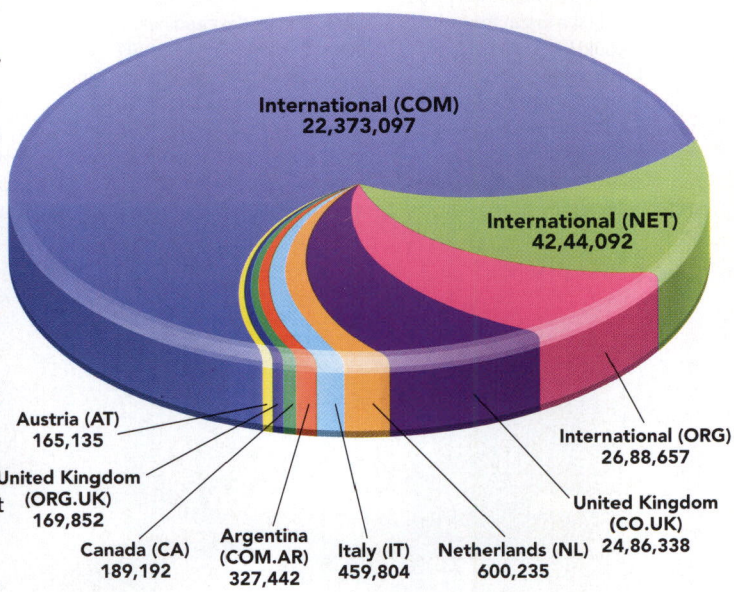
An understandably hesitant start notwithstanding, the older generation has taken to the Internet like a duck to water and silver surfers are now among the most confident users of the Net.

Barclays' quarterly Consumer Internet Confidence Index, which tracks the sophistication of online activities carried out by a cross-section of Internet users, shows that the confidence of older surfers (aged 55+) jumped by 3.1 percent from December to March (see right). In contrast, the confidence of the youngest age group monitored (15 to 24) dropped by 1.6 points. But Barclays need not fear; the number in that group banking online grew by 12 percent. Confidence overall was up 4.7 percent, and although email and research usage fell slightly, leisure use such as chat rooms, gaming, shopping and finance all rose.



Domain game: Vatican City 2, polar bears 1, UK 2.4m

Ever wondered what the most popular domain names are? If so, head to Domain Stats (***www.domainstats.com***) and keep an eye on things. You'll find there are more than 35 million domain names registered, and you probably won't stand back in amazement to discover that almost two-thirds of them are .com. Even the most severe market slump won't change that. Good ol' .co.uk is easily the most popular of the geographically-specific domains, its 2.4 million registrations being four times that of nearest rival, the Netherlands. Our graph to the right is of domain names rather than countries, which will miff New Zealanders: there are 10 types of .nz domains, more than any other country, but the total registration figure of 90,000 would still only just squeak into the top 20. Down at the bottom, two domains are registered in the Vatican City and one in the remote Arctic Norwegian dependency of Svalbard & Jan Mayen Islands. PolarBear.sj, anyone?



ILLUSTRATIONS: PETER LIDDIARD

QUICK FIGURES

YOU'LL NEVER BELIEVE IT...»

- The rise in viruses is outpacing the growth of email, according to MessageLabs (***www.messagelabs.com***). It predicts a 222 percent rise in the number of viruses arriving at Government offices this year from just 62 percent more emails
- **A third of Britain's largest organisations have suffered cybercrime, says a survey by the Communications Management Association (*www.thecma.com*)**
- Five million units of counterfeit MS software, worth £1.2 billion, have been seized since August. MS has been awarded £12 million in judgements since January
- **We're spending longer online, says Jupiter Media Metrix (*www.jup.com*) – up 51 percent from February 2000 to a total of 97.7 billion minutes in February 2001. Home use has risen faster than office use, up 59 percent to 72.7 billion minutes**

:// NEW SITES

Learn, bet, buy and insult online

VEE-TV: the Web site of the TV programme is a real eye-opener for deaf and hearing surfers alike

REVIEWED
VEE-TV
www.channel4.com/plus/vee-tv
BLACK & ASIAN HISTORY MAP
www.blackhistorymap.com
RANDOMBET
www.randombet.com
BUYERSVIEW
www.buyersview.co.uk
MATOOX
www.matoox.co.uk

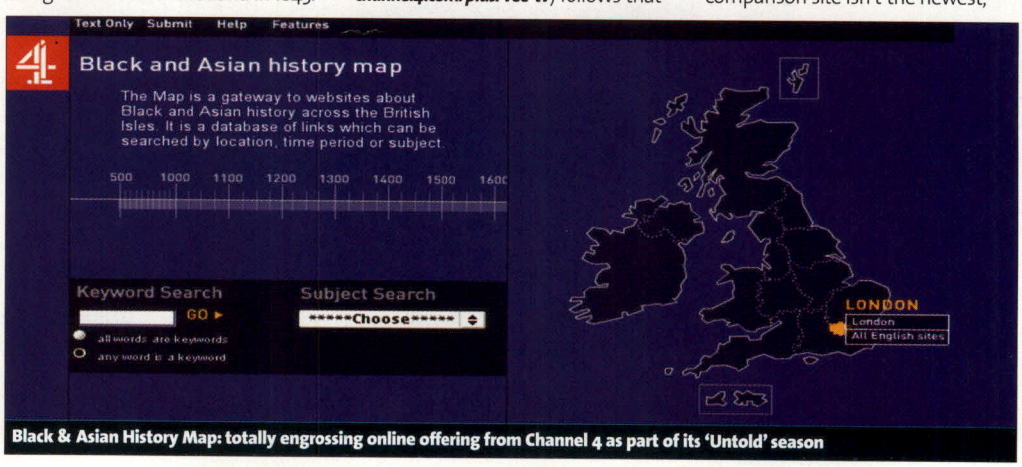
LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Just as education, information, collation and entertainment are key functions of the Internet, so they are also key responsibilities of broadcasters, like Channel 4.

C4's minorities programming often succeeds in making the worthy worthwhile, an achievement reflected in its Black & Asian History Map site (***www.blackhistorymap.com***). The site gathers together hundreds of sites and pages about Black and Asian history, which can be searched via a UK map, a timeline which scrolls under the cursor or a good old-fashioned text search.

But the map is more than just a directory, albeit a fascinating one that you could lose yourself in for hours. There are also videos and features on such topics as the Black Irish in Caribbean Montserrat and how American slave Frederick Douglass set sail for Scotland in 1845. Part of Channel 4's 'Untold' season, the map is endlessly absorbing and a salient lesson in race relations.

Another minority well catered for by C4 is the deaf and hearing-impaired. New TV series *VEE-TV* has tackled such deaf issues as eating disorders, drug taking and coming out as gay in a manner never previously attempted. The site (***www.channel4.com/plus/vee-tv***) follows that lead with a lively forum where users can discuss any issues they please and make suggestions about the design and nature of the site.



Black & Asian History Map: totally engrossing online offering from Channel 4 as part of its 'Untold' season

BET CINCH

Given former England boss Kevin Keegan's well-known predilection toward the horses, it's no surprise that he's become non-executive director of a betting site.

However, like KK himself, Randombet (***www.randombet.com***) takes a fresh angle on the pastime. Take the opening offer on the site's launch in February of 16-1 on Manchester United to win the league; even at that stage of the season the Red Devils were dozens of points clear and other bookies were offering 500 to 1 odds on.

How so? The 'Randomizer' in effect replicates a sweepstake. Having checked the odds and outcomes, you stump up your stake of a quid or more and your selection is made at random (it's independently adjudicated, Lottery-style). Those who get Man U, start planning how to spend your winnings. And if you don't care about football or the gee-gees, you can bet on a widening range of things including which character will speak first on *Coronation Street* that night.

BUY BEFORE YOU TRY

Not everybody wants to bet their money randomly, but there's a school of thought that says that's exactly what you do when shopping online. Thus the less-than-sensational growth in e-commerce.

This lack of consumer confidence so concerned a group of Scottish businessmen that they set up Buyersview (***www.buyersview.co.uk***), styling it The Internet Consumers' Champion. The idea of a shopping comparison site isn't the newest,

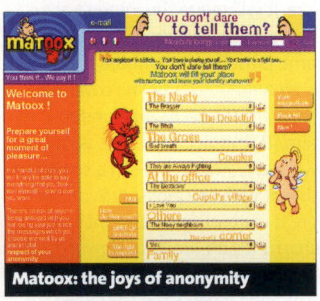
WORDS: GARY PARKINSON

but the opinions stated on Buyersview aren't from journalists but the general public. Feedback is collected and computed into at-a-glance percentage tables so, for instance, potential travellers can see EasyJet (100 percent delivery, 91 percent order process) is top of the class while Ryan Air (64 percent security and privacy, 66 percent customer service) needs to work much harder if it's to gain customer confidence.

But Buyersview isn't a one-trick pony; beside extensive safety tips there's also Get Me The Manager, an online complaints service on the consumer's behalf, and Abandoned Trolley, which asks consumers why they gave up on their shopping trip. And in a neat reversal, it's all defined as C2B; consumers giving feedback to business.

PSST... SHH!

We all have things we'd love to tell a co-worker, friend or potential paramour – if only we could get away with it anonymously. Setting up a fake Hotmail address has always been an option, but now there's a way which is much more fun: Matoox (***www.matoox.co.uk***). The strange name betrays its origins in France and Italy, as does the passion behind its range of 150 gender-specific messages, each with its own cartoon and attendant message. Whether you want to tell someone



Matoox: the joys of anonymity

they have personal odour problems or proclaim undying love, Matoox will help keep your identity a secret.

A two-minute registration programme gives you the choice of a free e-card, an enveloped postcard for £2.76 or, if you feel like pushing the boat out, a personalised trophy or T-shirt for £7.59. When you send the email, a tracker system reports back when the message has been sent and again when it's opened, but take care; receivers are given the opportunity to respond to your missive, albeit without finding out your identity, so don't start anything you can't finish.

East meets West as Microsoft links up with Xbox

Broadband of the Rising Sun

REVIEWED
TOKYO GAME SHOW
www.gamecenter.com/Features/Exclusives/Tgs
X-BOX
www.xbox.com

GET READY FOR BROADBAND

Microsoft hit the online console news yet again at last month's spring Tokyo Game Show by announcing a broad-reaching partnership with Japanese telecom monster NTT. The deal seals the fate of Xbox in Japan and should bring broadband to the game-playing masses of the Land of the Rising Sun next year.

To put into perspective just how important the online future is for the biggest console hitters Microsoft and Sony, NTT's stand at the show was larger than Tekken-maker Namco's. Anyone who knows their games will currently be picking their jaw off the floor. Multiple telecom deals are apparently about to be announced for Xbox in Europe. And as for Sony, only Sony knows.

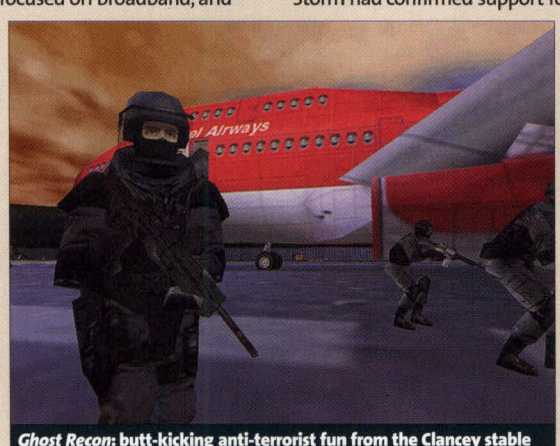
The chase is well and truly joined. Always a precursor to what will come to pass in the rest of the world about 12 months later, Japan is focused on broadband, and focused hard. Sony is leading the other front, and has confirmed a partnership with Sega and Namco to build a network of mega-servers – based, obviously, on PlayStation 2 technology – for the ever-popular Japanese arcades. Sony reps in Europe confirmed to *the net* that the project is basically an initial test for PlayStation 2 online gaming functions in the home. *Gran Turismo*, multiplayer, with a LAN speed connection. A mouth-watering prospect for gaming addicts.

Game-wise, the show was a little disappointing for the online player, and although the Sony mantra of 'This is happening, and it's happening now' rang round the halls of Tokyo, it's obvious any kind of mass broadband access is many moons away in Europe. Sega announced 11 upcoming titles for Xbox, including a sequel to Saturn classic *Panzer Dragoon*, a follow-up to Dreamcast skater *Jet Set Radio* and a new version of the frankly terrible Sega *GT* – but none were fingered for online play. Our advice is to watch Japan like a hawk.

A WHOLE LOT OF XBOX

Rainbow Six and *Rogue Spear* will be known to many of you as the PC adaptations of Tom Clancey's anti-terrorist novels. Our US cousins went for the titles with unreserved gusto, and despite the questionable graphics, the multiplayer aspects of crawling around stately homes blowing each other to smithereens with frag grenades left a serious hankering for more. Plus there were plenty of big guns involved...

The cat's out of the bag. Insiders at developer Red Storm had confirmed support for Xbox at launch (hardly surprising; Clancey is American as apple pie), but the name of the game is now in the open: *Ghost Recon*. The game will be shown at Californian expo E3 in May and will allow Xbox and PC gamers to take each other on over the Web. According to sources close to the project, it takes a fairly serious departure from the original games and looks 'wicked'. More on this next month...


***Ghost Recon*: butt-kicking anti-terrorist fun from the Clancey stable**

:// MOVIES

War: what is it good for? Making money...

REVIEWED
Pearl Harbor
studio.go.com/movies/pearlharbor
The Mummy Returns
www.themummy.com
Highlander: Endgame
www.highlanderendgame.com

PEARL'S A SWINGER

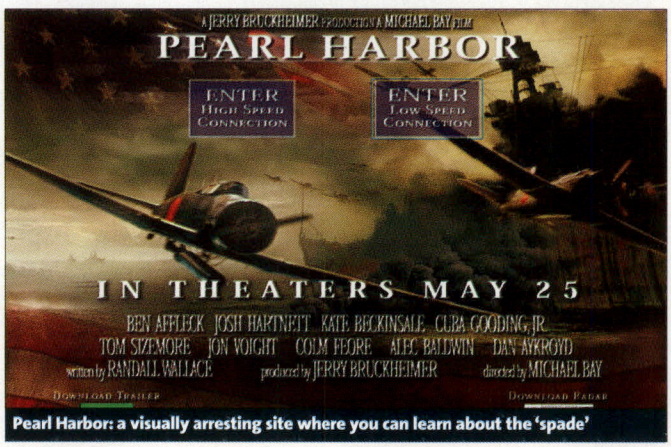
The blockbuster season is upon us, and we all know what that means: explosions. Big ones. And lots of them.

From the people that brought you *Armageddon* and *Con Air*, *Pearl Harbor* looks set to lead the way with its enormous set pieces, heady romance and no small degree of 'Gawd Bless America' sentiment, since it deals with a heartfelt moment of US history. A graphic-intensive site, be warned that even the slow-connection site is clunky, being optimised as it is for Flash. Nice, though, that they give you the chance to download a small desk-top-bound navigation bar.

With its nifty entrance interface – tuning a radio dial to intercept both sides' propaganda messages – the main site revolves around a cockpit radar system to navigate the site, with the various areas marked as bombing targets. Inside, the content is squarely aimed at depicting the wartime era: fashion, current events and the military. You can even learn about the very useful 'entrenching tool', also known as a spade.

Visitors can view the site from either the Japanese or American perspective. Amusingly, you go to the same site (whichever side you choose), slyly suggesting that everything you see you should aim to utterly annihilate.

While the trailer is present and correct, the site is rather short on information about the film. That said, it does feature currently 'restricted areas', undoubtedly to go live upon the film's release. Still, this is a visually arresting and informative – if not overly exciting – site, which promises to get better.



Pearl Harbor: a visually arresting site where you can learn about the 'spade'

The Mummy: attractive but lacking in the kind of excitement generated by the film

MUMMY, I'M SCARED

With sound effects reminiscent of someone playing the sitar in a the middle of a hurricane, *The Mummy Returns* site ushers you in to its Flash-laden environs. The sequel to the 1998 blockbuster picks up a decade later, where dashing hero Rick must once again face the monstrous Imhotep, this time to save his son. If the trailer (a whopping 26.5Mb here) is anything to go by, the film promises a face-off between legions of Egyptian zombies and WWF's The Rock.

So, the site's going to be packed with interactive goodies, yeah? With lots of information about ancient Egyptian lore? And maybe even some games? Sadly not. An attractive site (dark golden hues, explosive sounds, streamlined navigation) with a fair guide to this much-anticipated feature, it doesn't bother harnessing the excitement surrounding the film. So, while you can read all about the stars and production staff, what you really want – behind-the-scenes info, interviews, a look at the eye-popping effects – are strangely absent.

Registration promises Web-only exclusives and access to hidden areas of the site, but as I write, my mailbox is still empty. Although by the time you read this the site may have undergone a 'resurrection'...

YOU AND I ARE GONNA LIVE FOREVER

Finally, with the sound of thunder and clashing swords, we reach the Gothic fantasy world of the Highlander. This month sees the release of *Highlander: Endgame*, the third sequel to the 1986 hit, where film and TV Immortals (French Scotsman Connor and American Scotsman Duncan) meet to face the evil Immortal Kell. Maybe, finally, someone will win that bloody prize!

Of the two sites available, ignore the one featuring an open letter pleading with fans to ignore the bad press(!) and head straight to the excellent Dimension films version. The site trades heavily on atmosphere, dominating the screen and replete with a Gothic, moody feel. Rather than providing overt film coverage, this site offers a brilliant resource of the Highlander myth, making it tailor-made for fans.

With great coverage of all the major characters and Highlander lore, it will pique the interest of newcomers and easily satiate long-time fans. The undoubted highlight is an animated timeline covering pretty much every Highlander film/TV event. Confusions about what a 'Gathering' is can also be put to rest with the glossary. With such great content and design, it's a shame it's off-limits to slower connections, but it's well worth exploring if you have the speed.

DOT COM DUFFER OF THE MONTH:

Tigerland
www.tigerlandmovie.com

Tigerland is both a captivating war drama and Joel Schumacher's best apology yet for *Batman and Robin*, but the site is pedestrian at best. You can read about the story, cast and crew, but whither the behind-the-scenes info? The research? Filming? Interviews? All good info, sure, but there could have been much more. Given the Net's potential for captivating and atmospheric sites, it's sad to see such an artless affair, especially when the subject matter is crying out for attention. Too general, too frustrating.

:// MUSIC

At the very heart of it: new Yorke, new Yorke

REVIEWED

Radiohead
www.followmearound.com

Rem
www.remhq.com

Oasis
www.oasisinet.com

AUDIO THRILLED THE RADIO STARS

If any one band has used the Web, manipulating it to its benefit while still maintaining complete and absolute control, it's Radiohead. Last year, discarding all conventional industry approaches to promotion and the mechanics of record selling, they abandoned the traditional treadmill of interviews and ads, inventing instead the 'blip' as a promotional tool for the ground-breaking *Kid A*. Useable across media, the 'blip' – a downloadable piece of audiovisual software in typically obtuse Radiohead style – proved the naysayers wrong and even helped set Radiohead further apart from their floundering contemporaries.

Their sites, too, have helped to position them as an act apart. Imagery and artwork placed on the official site, ***www.radiohead.com***, has been appropriated by others to the extent that little static pencil cartoons are now almost as identifiable as photographs of the members themselves. It is an incredible trick. Coming up to the 4 June release of new album *Amnesiac*, the sites will be no less important. Official news will appear on the official site (band members have a habit of popping up on the noticeboards there, too) while keen Radiohead watchers should bookmark ***www.followmearound.com***, a site which trawls the Internet for any Radiohead-related story and keeps them all together in one handy place. It also has a keen radar and never turns up a bum detail. Climbing Up The Walls (***www.freespeech.org/climbingupthewalls***) is also one to check, if only for the regularly posted pre-release and live tracks.

As for the music you'll be downloading, *Amnesiac* makes *Kid A* look like a rehearsal. Forget stories about it being more commercial and a return to *The Bends*. There are a few identifiable singles such as *Pyramid Song* and *Knives Out*, but these serve to provide balance and a necessary counterpoint to the rest. While still at times perplexing and difficult and claustrophobic and dense, it is also quite, quite brilliant. A confident contender for album of the year.

REM 'REVEAL' ALL

If Radiohead are regularly trotted out as the biggest band in the world commercially and artistically, they're not the first. When REM return on 14 May with their 12th studio album *Reveal* they will find themselves in a rather curious position at rock and roll's top table. Anticipation leading up to the new release has been marked by gentle curiosity rather than nail-biting tension. And despite the fact that initial mutterings around the record have tied it closer to the hugely successful *Automatic For The People* than more recent patchy affairs, it's not going to be an album that will have devotees queuing the night before release to secure their copies. It feels a long way away from breakthrough, multi-million-selling *Out Of Time*.

The thing is, though, it would be foolish to write them off right now. Just as U2 harnessed the Internet through their official site and countless fan sites to slowly build up anticipation for *All That You Can't Leave Behind*, helping to deliver their most successful record in years alongside a sold-out world tour, so it is with REM.

Their site, ***www.remhq.com,*** has been an important point of contact since the band went into the studio early last year. Manager Bertis Downs has posted news, views and photographs continually. With recent revamps it now comes with a host of additional bells and whistles and looks great. Among the treasures is a library featuring clips from all of the videos made by the band. In doing so, it has made itself an essential destination. It is also worth keeping an eye on ***www.murmurs.com***, a fan-site that knows what is going on in REM world before Michael Stipe. All told, the Internet could yet make REM vital all over again.

Keep track of Oasis' progress in the studio at alt.music.oasis

OASIS GIVE IT THE GUN

As this has been a month of big-hitters, we may as well sign off maintaining the theme with Oasis. Noel, Liam and the other three have been locked in a studio in High Wycombe working on a new album for some weeks. And the rumours about what can be expected – not to mention tales of their demise – have begun in earnest. At the time of going to press ***alt.music.oasis*** had reported the title to be *Longtime Servant Of The Gun*. However, by the time you read this, the title may well have changed. It is worth, though, keeping an eye on the boards and the official site (***www.oasisinet.com)*** to download any demos that may leak out and also because there is a whisper that Oasis are keen to get a new single out before the summer.

WORDS: PATRICK GARRATT (GAMES); DECLAN ALBISTON (MUSIC); DANNY GRAYDON (MOVIES)

LEARNING SUE WEEKES

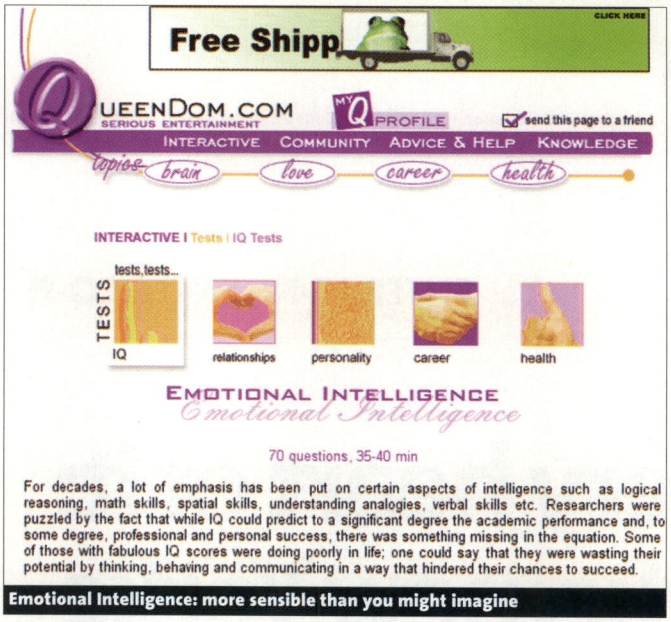
Overcome with emotion

'WHAT'S YOUR EQ LIKE?' ASKED THE leader of the human resources discussion group I'd agreed to take part in for a recruitment magazine. Eh? Did they mean my knowledge of the Single European Currency or had he really meant to say IQ? Baffled, I did what most people would and mumbled, 'OK, when I last looked,' before scurrying off to look it up on the Internet.

EQ, or EIQ, stands for Emotional Intelligence Quotient and is one of the latest methods employers use to assess a candidate's suitability for a job. Forget those dodgy inkblot tests and graphology, emotional intelligence (EI) claims to be a far more modern and relevant way of assessment. Apparently, all those academics who put the emphasis on logical reasoning and mathematical skills are barking up the wrong tree. What's really important in achieving lifelong success and fulfilment has more to do with how you manage your emotions and your ability to empathise with others, in other words, your EQ.

If it all sounds a bit touchy-feely Nineties, that's because it is. Researchers who were puzzled why those with a high IQ often performed poorly in life found that EI was the missing link in the equation and Daniel Goleman's 1996 book, *Emotional Intelligence*, put it firmly on the map in the workplace sector.

By now, I was itching to find out my own EQ. Despite failing the eleven-plus, six driving tests and a traumatic start in sewing classes at school, I'd always figured I had a good self-image and was a fairly well-adjusted, team-playing individual. So, such a test held no fears for me.



Emotional Intelligence: more sensible than you might imagine

First off, I went to the Turnkett Leadership Group's site at ***www.leadershipcharacter.com/eq_quizz.htm*** and took the test. I received a score of five points for 'concern' (above average) and my 'perspective-taking ability' was three and a half (average). It also told me that I was 'socially intelligent and fairly diplomatic'.

Such a pleasing start made me crave more EQ plaudits, so I made my way to Queendom (***www.queendom.com/tests/iq/emotional_iq.html***), which offers a suite of interactive tests. This was much longer at 70 questions and was to take 35-40 minutes. Again, things started simply, moving on to more complex scenarios where I had to make a behavioural judgement on Emma, the bed and breakfast owner who didn't like being out of her depth in party conversation and Nancy, a secretary who was nice to her superiors but obnoxious to subordinates.

By now, I was really exercising my grey matter and began to relate it to people and things in my own life and workplace. The results again put me at above average but I was also told I didn't have all the knowledge necessary for full development of my emotional intellect. Mmm... better find it somewhere then.

And find it I did at the Haygroup's site (***www.ei.haygroup.com/default.asp***). The questions were more scenario-based and, even better, gave the answers at the end. Here I really felt I started to learn something. It told me how to deal with a colleague who claims credit for your idea in a meeting: apparently, 'publicly thank them for referencing your work afterwards and give the group more specific detail about what you were trying to accomplish' as opposed to my spineless option C answer: 'Nothing: it's not good to embarrass colleagues in public'.

In this test I achieved my worst score of the day: a mere 35 out of 100, well below average. However, the site says one of the basics of EI is 'persisting in the face of setbacks and channelling your impulses in order to pursue your goals'.

My EQ testing exercise was one of my most enlightening Internet experiences of the week and a lot more rewarding than idling the time away on Banana Lotto. We can all do with a little self-assessment now and then (not just of the income tax variety) and it might just make you a better person.

MUSIC ROBERT JEFFERY

Bring back the free music...

I SUPPOSE I KNEW THE DEATH KNELL HAD sounded for Napster when BMG announced it was forging a 'partnership' with the well-known musical pirates. Such arrangements usually result in tears before bedtime, and you can bet they won't be shed by a conglomerate of Bertelsmann's size.

If Shawn Fanning and his cohorts were living on borrowed time, I reasoned, now was the time to grab as much free music as I possibly could (best hope any Fraud Squad officers reading this have better things to do than batter my door down at 6am – though it would get me up for work...).

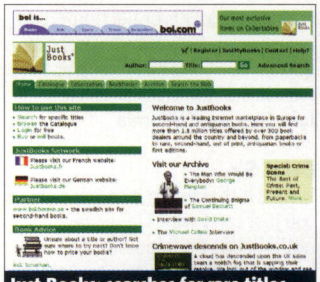
Unfortunately, this proved to be trickier than I had anticipated. It quickly became clear that the volume of files on Napster's servers had been cut drastically after the court ruling. Worse, someone had apparently been tampering with the system.

This was rammed home when I decided to, erm, circumnavigate the stifling wheels of global capitalism by downloading the new album by a well-known three-piece guitar band for free. Sure enough, all the files were present and ready to grab. I loaded them onto a portable and prepared for a journey home supplemented by free tunes.

Napster: looks like the party's over

The sound which subsequently emanated from the player can best be described as a sheet of corrugated iron being repeatedly smacked with a hammer as a household pet, clearly in distress, looked on, although it may have been what the kids refer to as 'trip hop'. The following evening I gave it a second go, only to find the single from a major American band I thought I had taken was a completely unrelated track. Such a phenomenon is apparently known as 'the Napster bomb' and probably originates from record company types trying to mess with the pirates – when one duff file is uploaded, it spreads like a virus.

And so it seems I must wave goodbye to the days of free music: which, I concede, is reasonable enough, as it is strictly speaking illegal . But it isn't fair. And I want my ball back. Now.



Just Books: searches for rare titles

E-COMMERCE

FAY WOLFTREE

Money for old books

It's not the kind of thing you expect from Dame Edna Everage, but her alter-ego, Barry Humphries, is a collector of paintings by one Austin Osman Spare, artist, occultist and proponent of chaos.

Admittedly, Mr Humphries favours works from Spare's years as a World War I battlefield artist, rather than his more erotic, esoteric works, but still, Spare is obscure, to put it mildly, and those in the know border on the fanatical. Accordingly, books by or about the man whose favourite past-time was something called atavistic resurgence can change hands for considerable amounts of money. As I happen to have in my possession *Images and Oracles of Austin Osman Spare*, one of a limited edition of 1,000, I rather fancied finding out how much it's changing hands for.

First stop was Just Books (***www.justbooks.co.uk***) which searches 1.5 million used and rare book titles held by 300 dealers. Not as rare as mine, apparently. On to UKbookworld (***www.ukbookworld.com***), which searches 1,500 dealers' databases. Still no luck, but it does point me towards the Central Register of British Internet Bookshops (***www.clique.co.uk***). Here, you can only search by dealer's name or specialist area. I enter 'occult' and it throws up several pages of links to dealers, with search facilities for each, but none turns in the desired result.

Clique suggests I try ***www.alibis.com***, where a search for the book's author, Kenneth Grant, reveals that another of his titles I own, *The Magical Revival*, is going for $222. Mine, however, is a first edition. I try an international site, ***www.adebooks.com*** and strike gold: my Spare book's worth £275. Now to find out what the other book's worth...

Look what we've found!

WIMBLEDON DOG TRACK *the net* goes to the dogs to assess the nation's surfing habits

NEIL KATELEY

ADVERTISING EXECUTIVE

I mainly use the Net for business research, but I also surf for music and football news. I'd have to say that TEAMtalk's site (***www.teamtalk.com***) is the one I visit most often.

STUART BRADBURY

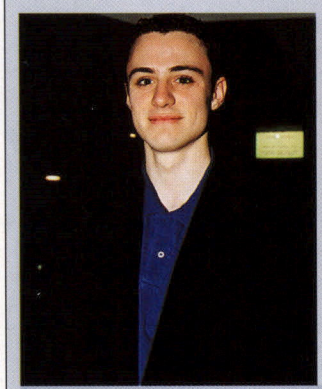
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

I design sites for a number of clients; they range from ad agencies to car manufacturers and Webcasters. My favourite site belongs to the company I'm with, ***www.thebank.co.uk***.

JAS WALKER

SUPPLY CHAIN, NESTLÉ UK

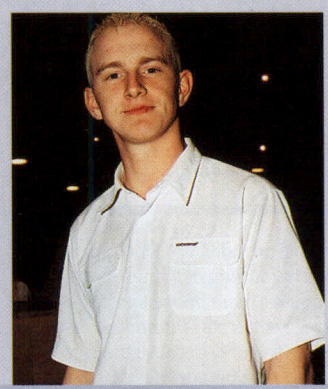
I often use the Internet at work for business purposes, but in my spare time I use it to look up sport and, well, everything really. I visit the BBC's site (***www.bbc.co.uk***) quite a lot.



KEVIN JONES

STUDENT

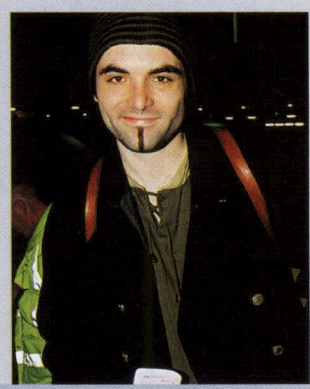
I study medicine, and use the Net mainly for research, but I also use it for shopping. I used to really like Breathe (***www.breathe.com***), but now I use Lycos (***www.lycos.co.uk***).



ADAM PORTER

SOLDIER

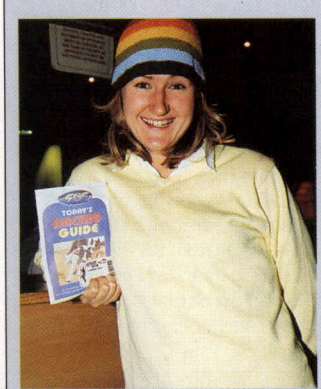
I visit the Net when I'm bored, just surfing around for fun mainly. I also visit Empire Interactive's site (***www.empireinteractive.com***) a lot; they have games and chat rooms.



THOMAS SZABO

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

I use the Net for work, but also for shopping and entertainment. It's difficult to think of one favourite site; I do visit ***www.heise.de*** quite a lot. It provides info about the Net.



TARA

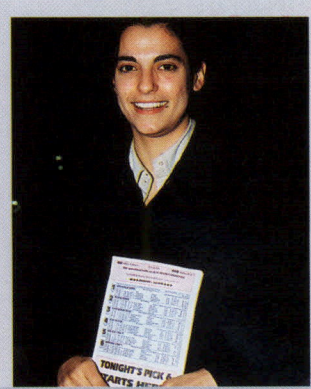
CONFERENCE ORGANISER

I use the Internet for everything: that's how I organise the conferences. I get all of my material off it, such as speakers and so on. I also like Reuters' healthcare site (***www.reutershealth.com***).

FAY HAMILTON

SALES EXECUTIVE

I visit the Net for various things, but mainly for research, probably. I also like Lastminute.com (***www.lastminute.com***) for booking holidays, basically, but for finding good deals on things as well.



CHRIS ELIA

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

I buy stuff and book holidays on the Internet, although today I was using it to look up song lyrics on Kiss This Guy (***www.kissthisguy.com***). My favourite site, though, is Ilicco.com (***www.ilicco.com***).

INTERVIEWS: JENNIFER KEARNS; PICTURES: RICHARD LAWRENCE

letters

Send your letters to: Inbox, *the net*, 38-42 Hampton Road, Teddington, Middlesex TW11 0JE or email us at ***thenetnow@haynet.com***

Dear Sir

LETTER OF THE MONTH In reply to the letter from Darryl delaHoyde (A Reader Rants, April 2001), I think Mr delaHoyde must be very new to the Internet as most ISPs are free. They don't charge for logging on to the Web. What's not free is the local phone charges.

Some months ago I set up a second account with ic24, my main one being with LineOne, and then joined ic24 on their freephone server. I knew I would be restricted to one hour surftime and would then get dropped. No problem. Then I found getting connected was a work of art in itself. Some nights I would sit at my computer pressing altC/esc and waiting the compulsory five seconds for the modem to reset for over an hour.

Then LineOne and BT introduced SurfTime. Now I pay £9.99 a month for unmetered access,which means I do not have to watch the phone bill rocket up to £90-plus a quarter. Also, I can log on to my ISP on my first attempt and not have to listen to some mechanical female telling me that 'the line is busy...please try again later'.

In all fairness, I suppose it's a case of each to his own but I am more than satisfied with what my meagre 10 quid gets me!

Steve Bromfield, via email

The backlash starts here...while there are a lot of very unreliable ISPs around, it's worth remembering that the cost of surfing often isn't anything to do with them. While we all get annoyed with 'free' not actually meaning free, it's BT that levies the charges, not the ISPs. Perhaps we should give them a little credit?

Dear Sir

I thought I'd write down the past two weeks of my Net life as it's had an amazing effect on me. Up until recently I'd been a subscriber to the BT Internet SurfTime package. For £9.99 a month I had free surfing in the evenings and at the weekends. I was very pleased with this service, and generally found the connection and speed acceptable. I also had an additional telephone line from my cable provider (NTL) for £5 a month so my surfing didn't tie up the house's main phone line. Then I got a letter from BT informing me that I'm very lucky because they are going to upgrade me to BT Anytime as of the 31 March, but I had to use a BT line in order to use this new service. The letter explained that if you didn't have a BT line you had two choices: have one installed, or bugger off (or words to that effect).

I remembered that a friend of mine had mentioned that NTL were offering cable modems in our area. I hadn't bothered to find out any of the details at the time as I figured that a high speed connection to the Web 24/7 would be very expensive, like Home highway and ADSL both are (in excess of £50 a month). Faced with BT kicking me off their service I decided to give NTL a call – and I'm very glad I did.

Since I've had a 512k cable modem fitted surfing has been oh-so-sweet, and all I pay is £24 a month. Cancelling the BT subscription, my additional line and the savings from the call charges from logging on outside of the free hours, I've saved money by going to a cable modem. If anyone needs convincing, all I'll say is that I downloaded a 33Mb file from the Net a couple of nights ago in roughly 10 minutes. Life is really very good.

Remi, via email

And if you'd like any pointers on how to use your extra bandwidth, see our gaming feature on page 46.

Dear Sir

Just when I thought the whole world was online (March issue), I now find out that Tonga really isn't cyber-reachable and I might as well forget my friends in Bhutan. 'The Web: Not Worldwide' was a very informative article. I notice I get some email from West Africa and they all seem to be utilising the Internet from either some cyber cafe or a hotel. No one seems to be emailing from his or her home: I do believe Web TV is our final hope in getting everyone hooked up to the wonders of the cyber-universe!

Jose Causing, California

Dear Sir

Why is it that when it comes to kids, you just can't win? There's been nothing but trouble since we bought our first modem and went online. First it was the call charges: the eight-year-old and the 10-year-old managed to run up a bill totalling hundreds of pounds, apparently 'doing homework'. So we signed up to BT SurfTime. Now we could all surf to our hearts' content in the evenings and at weekends. End of problem. Or so we thought.

Now the entire household runs around the magical hour of six o'clock when SurfTime kicks in. Three kids jostling to be first, and the wife's not much better, either. Having free access has given her the confidence to explore and now she's firing off emails all the time.

The wife, in her wisdom, thinks we should sign up to BT Anytime, or one of the other deals where you pay a monthly fee and that's all. I'm opposed to the idea at the moment: I actually quite like my family and I fear they'll ignore me completely if they've got the option of 'interacting' with a screen whenever they choose. Help me! What should I do?

Desperate Dad, via email

Readers! Do you have a solution to the problem outlined above? Why not write in to the above address, or send us your own personal problems to share with the nation...

A reader rants

When cheap isn't cheerful

I'm sick of thinking someone's sent me a nice present of some CDs, only to find out that the person concerned was me and they've gone straight on my credit card bill. Most of the ordering seems to happen late on Friday night after I get back from the pub. I come in, turn on the computer to check my email and there are messages from the likes of HMV saying 'visit our site, lots of bargains to be had', etc.

When CDs are going for a fiver, it's easy to get loads of stuff on spec. Then you went and told us about CD-Wow (*www.cd-wow.com*) and now I'm buying new releases by artists I've never even heard of and most of which are tripe. Which reminds me, can I have a go at your reviewer who rated Daft Punk? Rubbish.

So what I want to know is, why don't they fit alcohol detectors to PCs? Surely there could be some sort of gadget that measures the amount of alcohol on your breath and if there's too much of it, won't let you order anything online? Whoever invents it will make themselves very rich indeed. I'd gladly pay upwards of a hundred quid for such a device: it would save me a fortune.

Ben Walton, Cheshire

If anyone can help Ben – in any way – do get in touch.

WINE FOR WORDS!

The writer of Letter of the Month wins a case of fine wine from Rouge-Blanc.com, the award-winning Web site bringing 'Calais prices' to your door.

PICTURES: PA

WHO WE ARE For main contact details, see page 3

the net, 38-42 Hampton Road, Teddington, Middlesex TW11 0JE, United Kingdom
Email ***thenetnow@haynet.com*** **Phone** 020 8267 5000 **Editorial** 020 8267 5870 **Advertising** 020 8267 5015 **Subscriptions** 01795 414807 **Fax Advertising** 020 8943 5815 **Editorial** 020 8943 5819

CONTRIBUTORS Pat Garratt, Danny Graydon, Chris Hadley, Andy Hutchinson, Peter Liddiard. Clare Newsome, Steve Orino, Bruce Pope, Sarah Ramsden, Tim Richardson, Richard Tippett, Sam Upton, Rob Waugh, Sue Weekes, Fay Wolftree, Nick Wright **Editorial Secretary** Hazel van Wieringen ADVERTISING **Group Ad Manager** Rachael Coles **Ad Manager** Jason Dear **Assistant Ad Manager** John Burke, **Sales Executive** Catherine St Jean **Classified Sales** Gurbir Phull **Special Projects Manager** Martyn Jones **Secretary** Kate Collins PRODUCTION **Group Production Manager** Darren Jones **Production Controller** Jason Kerrigan THE MANAGEMENT **Associate Publisher** Emma Lees **Publishing Manager** Robert Frumkin **Publisher** Sian Rees **Head of Trade Marketing** Sarah Magraw **Group Subs Manager** Abby Payton **Editorial Director** Mel Nichols **Design Director** Paul Harpin **Finance Director** Brian Freeman **Managing Director** Kevin Costello **Chairman** Eric Verdon Roe

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Price comparison guide .uk Price domains £ p.a

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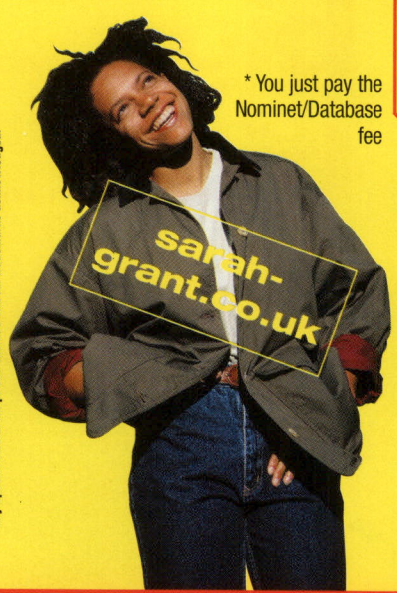
Freeserve	£49.00

Competitor prices taken from Internet magazine Apr 2001 and public websites, excludes any special offers. All prices exclude VAT. All trademarks acknowledged.



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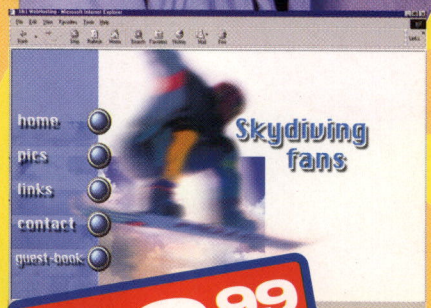

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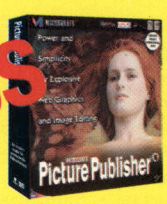

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What's it all About?

ABOUT.COM ***www.about.com*** The site that brought the human touch to factfinding

IT'S DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT THE long-term in the dot com world. Most Internet big-hitters regard a few months' time as a far-away proposition: it's refreshing, then, to find Scott Kurnit, founder and CEO of About.com, describing his company's strategies for the future as '20-50 years' time.'

But then Kurnit, the brains behind the world's sixth-most visited Web site, can afford to take the long-term view. While dot com rivals crash and burn around him, Kurnit has always been profitable and inexplicably secure about his site's position. It's such foresight that led to the 46-year-old entrepreneur being named third most important person in Silicon Valley in a recent poll of movers and shakers.

Certainly, you couldn't accuse About of being a flimsy venture. At the last count, this directory of articles and links on just about every subject under the sun boasted some 700 topics, 250,000 articles and a million links. Throw in an extended network with thousands of extra links, and it's clear why quantity has become king at About HQ.

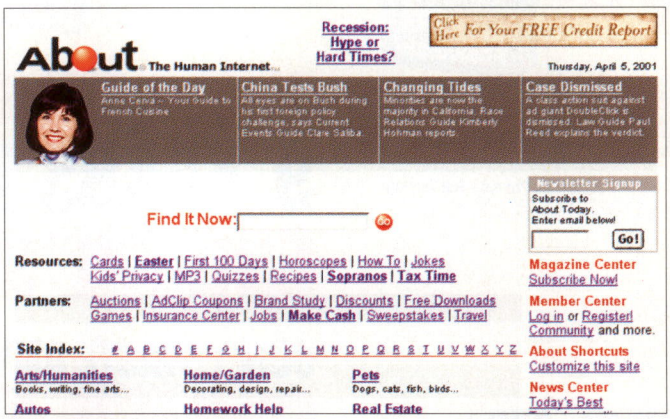
Kurnit had flirted briefly with new technology, launching a News Corp Web venture and working for an ISP, before he came up with the idea for About in the summer of 1996. 'Mechanical search engines were not providing clear, reliable results,' he recalls. 'We wanted to create an army of people to give it a bit of a human touch. We understood the power of lining up 700 sites with common aims and moving traffic between them. Most people doubted us; they didn't understand the power of a network.'

And thus About was born, initially named The Mining Co. The idea was simple and has changed remarkably little ever since: take a subject and assign a part-time 'guide' (typically a freelance journalist or professional) to it. The guide – who can earn up to £500 a month from advertising – compiles a detailed list of links, including site reviews, and keeps it updated with a series of articles to keep users coming back. Not for nothing does About call itself the 'Human Internet'.

While critics point to About's lack of focus as a weakness, it's a virtue, too. You really can find out just about anything there, and there's enough depth to rival even the weightiest encyclopedias. Whether it's browsing, looking for specific links or fact-checking, About is one of the most under-rated resources around (word of mouth and online marketing alone have propelled the site to its current giddy heights of 60 million unique users a month. The offline marketing spend has been next to non-existent).

A wander through About provides a microcosmic view of the world we inhabit: fashion, sport and e-commerce rub shoulders with basket-weaving, terrapin-owning and quilt-making. Each subject delivers authority and depth: the home brewing section, for instance, backs up a comprehensive guide to the subject with articles on the finer points of brewing, a glossary of terms, forums and thousands of links. An independent site on the subject would struggle to provide such resources, which is why About has cornered the online brewing market, as it has so many others.

Such dominance corners the advertisers, too, and has helped keep About in the black throughout the dot com recession. When Net shares took a nosedive in December, Kurnit merged the site with Primedia, a magazine publisher, making himself a tidy little profit in the process. The move was a masterstroke: Kurnit stays on and retains a financial stake, while deploying Primedia's offline advertising interests (they publish, for example, a quilt-making magazine) to drive up revenue.



:ABOUT.COM

WHAT IS IT?
Uber-directory offering a million links, backed with well-written articles compiled by experts in their fields

LAUNCHED
1996

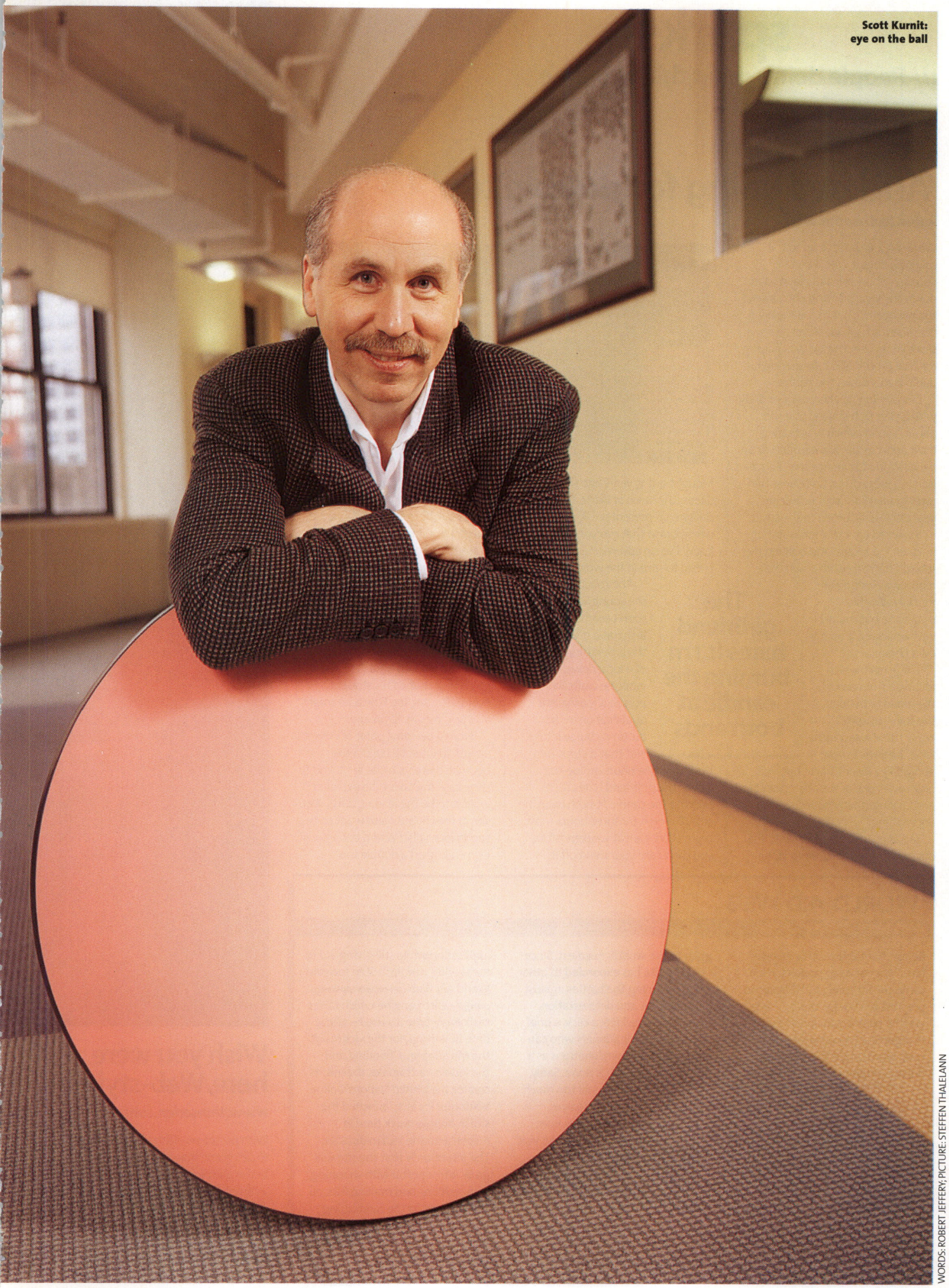
TRAFFIC
60 million unique users in December, making it the sixth biggest site in the world

BASE
New York

KEY FEATURES
Over 700 individual guides to different subjects, each offering links, articles and e-commerce opportunities; forums and chat rooms add interaction

About also launched three regional spin-offs to complement its UK-centric microsite (***www.about.co.uk***) and Kurnit plans further expansion, rather than revolution. 'We had our brushes with financial disaster. We stuck true to the original model, but managed to adjust to changing market conditions. Survival was the motivation early on; now it's wanting to be number one in terms of audience reached.'

So what keeps a multi-millionaire motivated? Money, probably, but Kurnit says he wants to enrich us all, too. 'We serve basic needs for real people and it's great to see people helped, as we do in the Health section of the site.' See, nice guys do win sometimes...



Scott Kurnit: eye on the ball

WORDS: ROBERT JEFFERY; PICTURE: STEFFEN THALELANN

brightsparks»

:// People doing great things online

'And he's going for double top'

www.toetheoche.co.uk

When Alex Bish steps up to the mark, he does it with a certain determination. His dad played darts down the local pub and encouraged the pre-teen Bish Jr to toe the oche (the line from which players throw); three years later the lad was playing for Essex Youth and hammering his dad's mates down the boozer.

Discovering he was equally handy with a pen, Bish started to write about a sport which was tearing itself apart as the top earners set up a rival World Championship. Education intervened, but last Christmas, after graduation from university, 21-year old Bish returned to the sport.

'I worked for a trial radio station in Essex,' he recalls, 'and covered the World Championship down the road. I was writing bits for *Darts World* magazine but mainly I was whacking it on my own personal site.'

The emails which followed from around the world didn't pass the savvy Bish by. 'I knew there was a niche for it,' he says. 'I knew about Sky's Planet Darts, but that only covers one of the championships and I thought why not cover the entire thing?'

Toe The Oche was, says Bish, 'the obvious name; there was a video

brought out 15 years ago with Tony Green, the Voice of Darts and *Bullseye* co-presenter – it's a catchphrase that everyone will know. I've no advertising budget so I need to spread the word.'

'The girlfriend hates it. I'm burning the candle at both ends'

The constraints upon the young Web master soon became obvious; Bish has a 9 to 5 job in the advertising division of a local newspaper while he waits to pursue a journalistic qualification in the autumn course intake. Not that it stops him putting in the hours on Toe The Oche: 'The girlfriend hates it, I'm burning the candle at both ends,' he says. 'I'm on it for three hours most nights and even at weekends too, you can't take your mind off it.'

The hard work is paying off, though, with interest aplenty. 'It's gone ballistic in the first six weeks, about 2,600 hits. I'm getting quite a few emails from Holland in pidgin English; after the top players left in the big split, a Dutchman became world champion and since then they've gone mad for the game.'

There's only so much Bish can do without backing, which unsurprisingly he's chasing hard ('I'm just a guy trying to shed his student overdraft'). But Toe The Oche might also be a means to an end.

'From a personal point of view it's a twofold interest: build a site because there's a niche for it, and to showcase my talent,' he explains. 'I want it to be the leading darts Web site in the UK but I also want to be a sports journalist.' Who'd bet against Bish ending on a double top?

:WORLD AID WEB

www.worldaidweb.com

Being charitable usually involves hard work or deep pockets. Then came the Internet, and it became possible to click for charity; early worthy pioneers included the Hunger Site (***www.thehungersite.com***), which upon the clicking of a button donated a few cups of grain to the world's neediest. Since then the site has expanded to other areas, including the battles against breast cancer and deforestation, using the same idea: a click, a brief ad for the multinationals who can write off charitable donations as a tax loss and the job is done. Sadly, this is still too much work for some people, for whom remembering to visit the site can be a problem. What's needed, if you'll pardon the use of the word, is a page which gives the surfer a practical application while still giving aid to the world's neediest. Step forward World Aid Web (***www.worldaidweb.com***), a search engine which raises cash every time it's used – at the time of writing, for the victims of the Mozambique flooding and the Indian earthquake. Indeed, its creator, the United Nations Online Volunteer Project, launched the site in double-quick time in response to the Indian disaster. The intention is that the site will grow into a portal with shopping, competitions and mailing lists, all contributing to the fundraising. Meanwhile, you can make a difference by adding it to your favourite search engines.

Wish you were here, Web-style

www.transeden.com

With postcards often taking longer to get home than you do, what better use of the immediacy of the Internet than to send one by email? Using the same concept as Web-hosted virtual birthday cards or bouquets, Transeden has produced special kiosks from which travellers can send virtual postcards complete

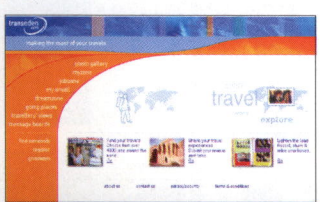
Bish: will the pen be mightier than the dart?

WORDS: GARY PARKINSON, ALEX NEWBY; PICTURES: STEVE ORINO

with photos of themselves, the place they're sending from and their message. The kiosks are positioned in top tourist venues.

'We want to keep the kiosks in places where people are enjoying themselves,' explains Transeden's founder and MD Donna Gayler. 'It's an impulsive thing, where people are having a few drinks with their friends or actually in a place where they want to say, "I'm here, I'm in Madame Tussaud's!".'

You can even send a video message, and soon you'll be able to use photos you've taken yourself. For £2 you can send your postcard to five email addresses. To view it, the recipient is directed to the photo gallery on the Transeden Web site, itself an essential all-in-one resource for travellers. Here you can research destinations, book flights and trains, and even find a job before you arrive to help fund your travels. There's a range of other facilities, too.



Transeden: keeps travellers in touch

'We realised there wasn't a one-stop-shop out there for the independent traveller,' says Gayler. 'Everyone who uses the kiosk is given their own personal Web space where they have a photo album, a travelogue where they can keep their diary, and a Vault where you can keep secure your passport details, driving licence, things like that. We wanted to provide everything in one space.'

Users can also decide whether to make different areas of their site public, restrict access to people in their Kiosk address book or keep it private. There's an interactive map which lets friends keep track of your travels, and even a Pin Board, where you can leave them messages. Truly a home from home.

ORGANIC FOOD SHOPPING ONLINE

Multiple organics on demand

Worried about foot and mouth? Try these sites...

WHAT WITH ONE THING OR another (first BSE, now foot and mouth) affecting farming and food production, organic food is becoming an increasingly popular choice (although organic farming isn't immune to foot and mouth disease, the incidence rate is lower due to the farming methods used).

So early April saw us hunting down the best organic sites on the Internet, and found us very impressed with the standard of organic online shopping...

The Fresh Food Co (***www.freshfood.co.uk***) has an impressive range of meat, fruit and veg at this cleanly laid out and easy to navigate site. The online ordering is simple and straightforward, making it a deserving winner of the Best Internet Retailer in the Organic Food Awards. But prices here were slightly higher than those we found on the other sites we looked at: half a kilo of beef mince worked out at about £3.70 – not high in itself, but there was a £30 minimum order for meat; fine if your daily diet consists solely of steak, not so useful if it doesn't.

The site also has a selection of cleaning and personal care products, as does Organics Direct (***www.organicsdirect.co.uk***). Although it doesn't stock meat the site's selection of fruit and veg is impressive, as is the selection of dairy and bakery items; babies are well-catered for with the Baby Organix range of food. Pricing here is competitive, with a five percent discount offered on each order if it is set up on a regular basis.

MEAT FROM £5.10/KG
www.westcountryorganics.co.uk
Buy all types of organic meat online – choose from beef, bacon chicken – even cooked meats.

Simply Organic (***www.simplyorganic.net***) – 'The organic supermarket' – offers a large range of organic products with the ubiquitous fruit and vegetable boxes, plus wine and beer as well as a comprehensive range of meat. Although prices were not the cheapest (500g mince was £4.59) there were no minimum orders and the selection was large. There was also detailed info on foot and mouth disease and how it relates to organic production.

If you feel organic produce is just too expensive, take a look at Westcountry Organics (***www.westcountryorganics.co.uk***). This has a varied product selection, and prices were excellent. A medium (7kg plus) box of veg was on offer for £11 with the option of including a fruit bag for £3.50 – comparing favourably with the Fresh Food Co's similar-sized fruit and veg box for £25.95. Even with a £4 delivery charge, it was still cheaper. Meat prices fared well, at £3 for half a kilo of mince.

The Organic Shop's site at ***www.theorganicshop.co.uk*** is clean, clear and quick to navigate, its cyber-shelves groaning under the weight of an impressive range of products. Everything from organic groceries, dairy, bread and veg were available, competitively priced, and the meat selection was varied and prices reasonable – 500g of mince was £3.48.

If you feel like immersing yourself in organic products, then cook meals using purely organic ingredients from Goodness Direct's (***www.goodnessdirect.co.uk***) large and extensive larder. Organic items range from pasta and herbs to tea and coffee, all available online.

And organic doesn't just mean food. Organic wine (made from organically grown grapes) is becoming more and more popular. Vinceremos (***www.vinceremos.co.uk***) is the leading online e-tailer of organic – plus vegetarian and vegan – wine. The site offers wine by country, with tasting notes, and the choice is huge; order by the case. OrganicOxygen at ***www.organic-oxygen.co.uk*** also has organic wine – in addition to organic beer, cider and champagne, with free delivery on all alcohol. Most of the site, however, is made up of personal care items and toiletries, made from organically grown ingredients, with rather lovely hampers on offer.

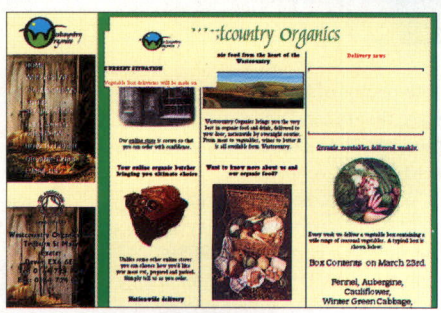
And after slaving away preparing your organic feast, treat yourself to some of Green & Black's (***www.greenandblacks.co.uk***) yummy organic chocolate; food for the soul...

So treat yourself to some organic food – the sheer choice of products that we found on offer was impressive and, as we discovered, it doesn't have to cost the earth...

;-) Our top Organic sites

ORGANICS DIRECT
www.organicsdirect.co.uk ★★★★★
This easy-to-use site has an extensive range of produce, competitively priced.

SIMPLY ORGANIC
www.simplyorganic.net ★★★★
Huge online selection of organic products, with straightforward ordering process.



WESTCOUNTRY ORGANICS
www.westcountryorganics.co.uk ★★★★★
One of the cheapest sites we found, with an excellent meat section.

WORDS: CLAIRE MCHATTIE; ADDITIONAL RESEARCH: SHAWNA NOBLE; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT

FRUIT AND VEGETABLE SELECTION £23.50

www.organicsdirect.co.uk

Grown without the use of chemical pesticides, get organic fruit and veg delivered to your door.

HAMPER £29.99

www.organic-oxygen.co.uk

Organic produce isn't just restricted to food, y'know. Pamper yourself organically here.

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www.simplyorganic.net

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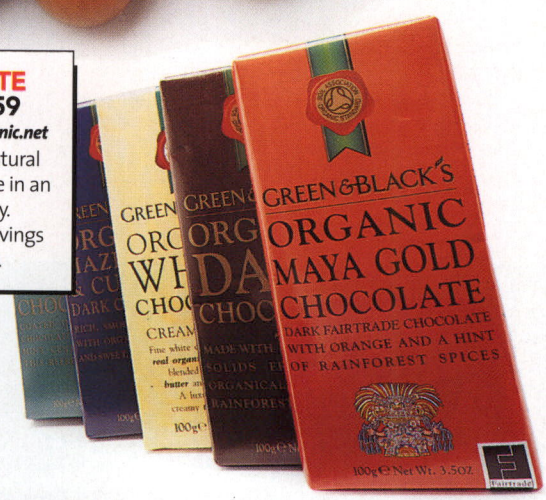
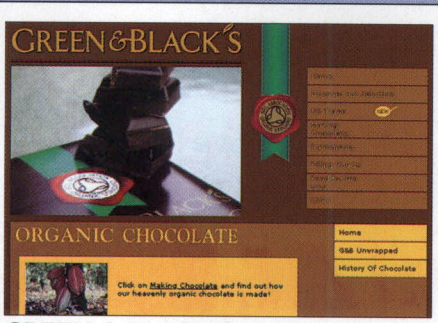


ORGANICOXYGEN

www.organic-oxygen.co.uk ★★★★★

Specialising in organic personal care items, OrganicOxygen has a wide selection of goodies.



GREEN & BLACK'S

www.greenandblacks.co.uk ★★★

Product information, recipes, stockists, chocolate history... but no online shopping, alas.

THE ORGANIC SHOP

www.theorganicshop.co.uk ★★★★

Huge online selection of organic goods – everything from fruit and veg to flour and sugar.

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* Internet Magazine December 2000 Top 30 ISP survey. Results based on Internet Magazine employees responses on overall quality of Installation, Performance, Value for Money and Technical Support.

thenet

AWARDS 2001

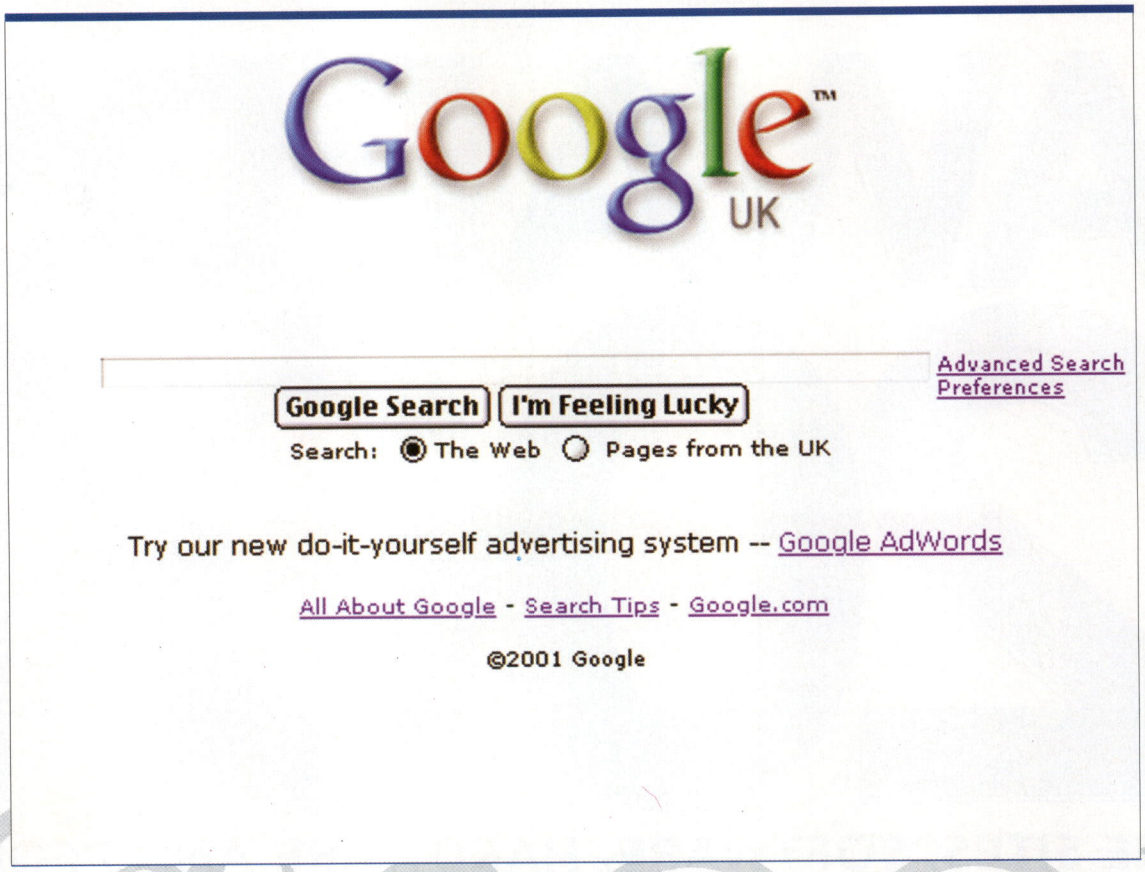
THE SITES, SOFTWARE, HARDWARE AND PEOPLE

SOME CALLED IT THE END OF THE INTERNET. OTHERS CALLED IT NATURAL EVOLUTION. ONE THING BECAME CLEAR AS WE DEBATED THE CONTENDERS FOR THIS YEAR'S NET AWARDS – THE DOWNTURN IN DOT COM BUSINESS HASN'T AFFECTED THE QUALITY OF THE WEB ONE BIT. IN FACT, REMOVING THE DEAD WOOD HAS MADE THE CREAM OF THE CROP BETTER THAN EVER. WE'VE SURFED FOR THE HOTTEST SITES, AND THROWN IN HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE TOO. PREPARE FOR THE BEST OF EVERYTHING...

★★★★★

BEST OVERALL SITE

★★★★★



Google

www.google.com

HOW TO DECIDE THE BEST WEB SITE IN the world? It all depends what you want. And there's the rub: whatever you want, you'll find it through Google. Quite simply the most powerful and best search engine in the world, it will identify that half-remembered lyric, answer that question, find that site, deal with your query. And it will do it in less than a second. As if that wasn't enough, you can now use Google.co.uk to refine your search to UK-only sites; its one weakness, its very globe-straddling nature, has been countered by aping Yahoo's country-specific nature.

So what does the gateway to everywhere look like? Not a lot, frankly. But that's no bad thing in an era when Boo.com spends £178m on looking flash and quickly collapses. Too many Web sites look like the cover of *Sgt Pepper's*, trying to cram in a bewildering number of graphics and references in what is essentially a limited space. Google's more like *The White Album*: beautifully brief and to the point. There's the logo, instantly recognisable yet subtly changed for special occasions (snow at Christmas, turkeys at Thanksgiving, the Tricolour on Bastille Day and fireworks on Independence Day); under it is the number of pages – fast approaching one and a half billion – you're about to search; and there's the gap you type your words into, confident it will find them. Whoever you are, wherever you are, Google has what you want.

BEST PORTAL

Yahoo!

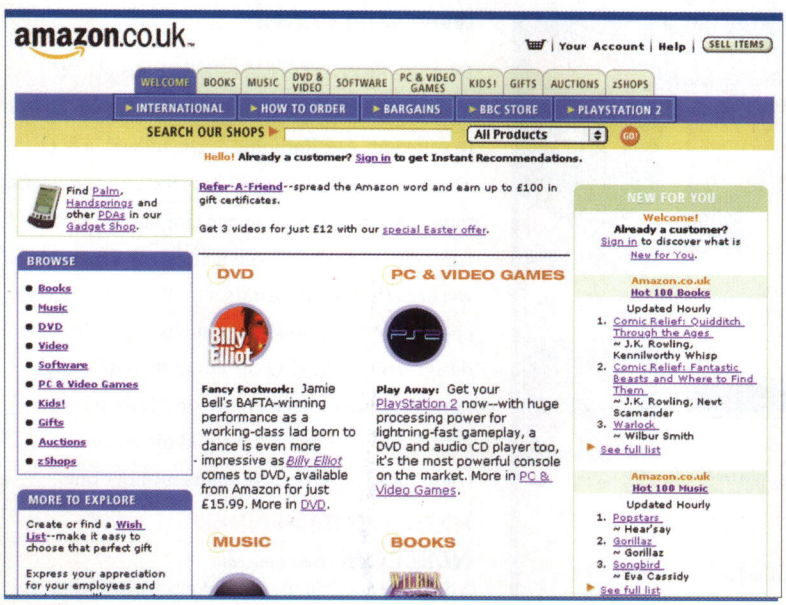
www.yahoo.com

WHAT DO YOU WANT WHEN YOU GO online? Studies show most people want email. That's here. Search engine? Check. Chat rooms? You bet. Shopping? Indeed. 'Chief Yahoo' – yes, that's his official title – Jerry Yang says he dislikes his creation being termed 'the centre of the Net', but more people choose Yahoo as a homepage than any other site simply because it's an ideal starting point for any Net voyage. Its search facility may not return as many pages as others (namely Google) but each has been checked by humans for relevance; that's why they call it a directory rather than an engine – and it has a Google results option, too. Yahoo has wisely concentrated on playing up the other strings to its bow: its Web-based email is probably one of the most popular after Microsoft's default favourite Hotmail, its news service brings you more than you could possibly want (or have time) to read, and then there's that directory: no bum sites, no broken links. Put it this way: it's the home page of choice for most of *the net*'s staff. No more words needed.

BEST E-COMMERCE SITE

Amazon

www.amazon.co.uk



THINK OF SHOPPING ON THE INTERNET and you'll no doubt think of Amazon. Since its inception in July 1995, Amazon has continued to offer great prices, wide choice and speedy delivery, all wrapped up in one of the most easy-to-use sites on the Web. If you've yet to test the online shopping waters, we recommend you take the plunge here. Whether you're looking for books, CDs, games or software, a few clicks of your mouse will have your purchases delivered to your door before your hard drive's had a chance to cool down. E-commerce at its best.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

CD-WOW!

www.cd-wow.com

International CD supplier which has revolutionised the market with ridiculously cheap prices and free delivery.

BLACKSTAR

www.blackstar.co.uk

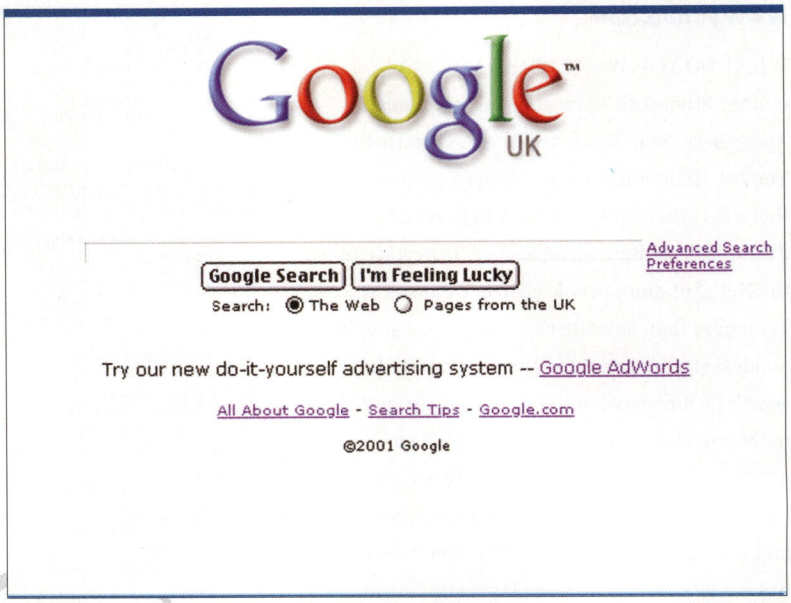
Northern Ireland-based DVD and video supplier, offering old and new releases and low prices.

BEST SEARCH ENGINE

Google

www.google.com

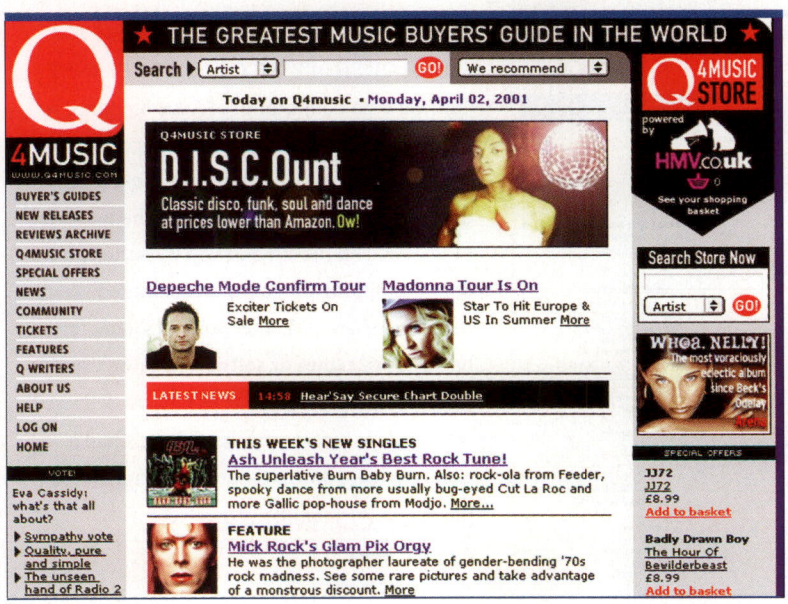
WE'VE SAID IT BEFORE AND WE'LL SAY IT again: if you want fast, no-fuss searching and you only have an obscure word or phrase to go by, type it into Google. How could we prove its reliability? Well, we chose the name of a small, independent comic book called *Sof' Boy*, typed it in ('sof boy'), and – bang! – the first five returns were right on the nose. Was it just a lucky break? Enter your own phrases at random and see how Google fares; you won't be disappointed. Another factor that's kept this search engine at the top of our list for the second year in a row is the recent launch of a UK-only service at ***www.google.co.uk***. Apart from the fact that it only searches British sites, it performs just like the original. A clean, mean, searching machine, Google works. Period.



HIGHLY COMMENDED

YAHOO! ***uk.yahoo.com***
If categories are more your thing, go to Yahoo!, where recommended sites are grouped under subjects.

METACRAWLER ***www.metacrawler.com***
Polls a range of search engines all at once to find what you're looking for.



BEST MUSIC SITE

Q4music

www.q4music.com

IN AS COMPETITIVE A SPHERE AS MUSIC, it's not enough to rest on your laurels; you have to reinvent. Ask Radiohead. Or, indeed, ask *Q*. The renowned rock monthly picked up last year's *thenet* Award for best music site but faced stiff competition this year when similarly venerated weekly *NME* revamped its site. Recognising the competition, *Q* upped the ante by improving the design and increasing the content. With daily news services to keep an eye on, those top 100 lists, forums, competitions and plenty of trademark humour, it remains number one.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

NME.COM ***www.nme.com***
A daily must-visit for music aficionados, NME.com shades Q for news and has enough features to keep you happy until the stereo repair man arrives.

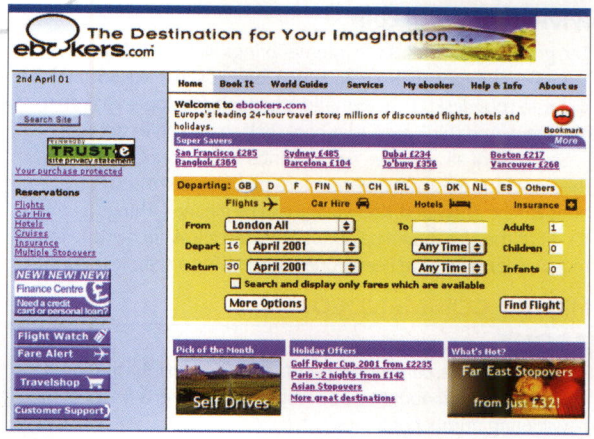
BEATLES.COM ***www.beatles.com***
The Fab Four's first official site was an all-singing, all-dancing audio-visual extravaganza, launched to coincide with the release of their *1* greatest hits package.

BEST TRAVEL SITE

ebookers

www.ebookers.com

The one-stop online holiday shop lets you do it all, from flights and car hire to all-inclusive package tours. Tired of the stormy weather? At the time of writing, ebookers was offering seven nights in Florida Keys for only £619, including flights, four-star accommodation and pre-paid taxes. And the deals didn't stop there, either. Booking your break is a cinch: submit a request online or call ebookers' agents at any time. The only trouble you'll encounter is making your mind up.



HIGHLY COMMENDED

STREETMAP ***www.streetmap.co.uk***

This online road atlas is still going strong and never leads us astray.

LONELY PLANET ONLINE ***www.lonelyplanet.com***

Why choose the online version over the paper product? Because it never goes out of date.

BEST SPORT SITE

CricInfo

www.cricinfo.com

There are very few sports where you can satiate your every need in one destination: cricket, however, is an exception. Cricinfo blows any attempted opposition clean out of the water with its comprehensive coverage of the worldwide game, including scorecards which sit on your desktop, profiles, hundreds of links and news from every level from Test to local leagues. Not attractive, but packed to the gills with information and stats – just what followers of the game love.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

TEAMTALK ***www.teamtalk.com***

An unspectacular success: the latest football news, from every club, updated several times a day. Compulsive and indispensable.

AUTOSPORT ***www.autosport.com***

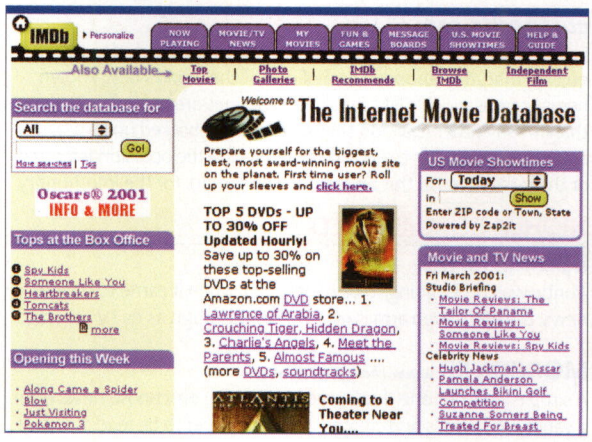
Popular motorsport portal with news, opinions and radio coverage.

BEST MOVIE SITE

IMDb

uk.imdb.com

So you're asking yourself, 'How many plaudits can *thenet* hurl at the IMDb?' Well, as many it deserves, really. The fact of the matter is the IMDb remains a faultless research tool. It's also a prime example of one of the Web's strengths: building links between people by way of a common interest. What CricInfo is to cricket fans, The Internet Movie Database is to film lovers. And, as always, there's no better place to find out the forgotten details about a film.



GUARDIAN UNLIMITED FILM ***film.guardian.co.uk***

Discerning reviews, in-depth features and a shrewd decision to link to the IMDb makes this a must-visit.

AIN'T IT COOL NEWS ***www.aintitcool.com***

This reviews and news portal is the closest thing you can get to having a Hollywood insider on your doorstep.

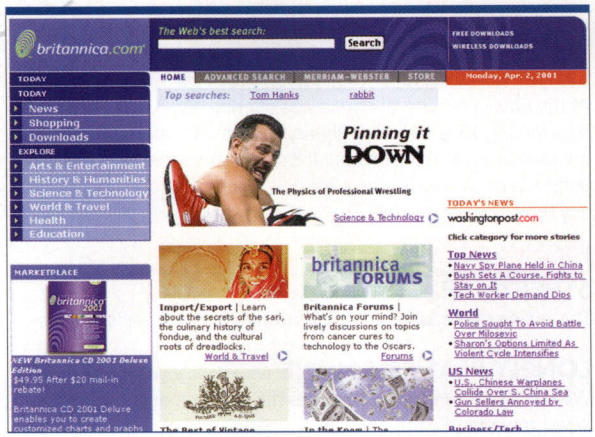
BEST LEARNING SITE

Britannica.com

www.britannica.com

The great leveller that is the Internet brings all the information from a shelf-straining, wallet-busting encyclopedic series like Britannica direct to your desktop on demand. You don't even have to bother dusting it. And think of all that bookshelf space you've got free.

Students of all ages love the easy interface, but not as much as they need the information Britannica provides in spades. Pub questions can be answered. Knowledge can be gleaned. Things learned. It's what the Net should be about. Early technical hitches due to massive demand have been ironed out, leaving a seamless portal.



HIGHLY COMMENDED

ABOUT ***www.about.com***

Part encyclopedia, part forum, part fan site and all information, a quick click around About turns amateurs into experts on a bewildering number of topics.

BEST HEALTH SITE

NetDoctor

www.netdoctor.co.uk

If you have an ailment or a medical query but can't face filtering through reams of information offered by a search engine or a long wait at the doctor's surgery, go to NetDoctor. From the home page you can jump to sections covering matters such as medical reference, pregnancy and support groups. The day's health news is available to peruse and, if you can't find what you're looking for on the site, you can email the NetDoctor directly or join in discussion forums for a personalised prognosis. With a list of physicians and consultants as long as your arm on board, this is the place to go for unadulterated information.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

THINKNATURAL ***www.thinknatural.com***

Natural remedies on your doorstep within one working day for UK residents, plus sound advice at the click of a mouse.

BEST NEWS SITE

CNN Europe

europecnn.com

Speed. That's the name of the news game and nobody does it quicker than the European arm of one of the world's best-known news organisations, CNN. Breaking headlines are posted faster here than on any other rival and they're frequently backed up by audio and video treats. Depth and clarity, alongside the occasional feature or think-piece, make this an essential bookmark for the info-hungry.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

BBC ***news.bbc.co.uk***

Auntie was never going to be caught out when it came to online news: the BBC's Web arm is every bit as thorough as its TV coverage.

MOREOVER ***www.moreover.com***

A simple idea, but one that's starting to catch on: choose news from a variety of sources and create a personal paper to be read at leisure.

BEST MONEY SITE

The Motley Fool

www.fool.com

Mixing money with humour, this financial advice site just keeps on growing. TMF serves millions of page views every month, has published seven books and has regular columns in newspapers.

The reason why it's so popular is simple: it offers sound advice on money management for the novice. And let's face it: the majority of us are novices. Whether you're thinking of investing in an ISA, getting a mortgage or a pension, or opening a new bank account, you can get the lowdown here. And that's just the basics.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

FT.COM ***www.ft.com***
Making financial news and share prices available to all, 24/7.

SELF TRADE ***www.selftrade.com/uk***
Online share dealing that's never shrouded in jargon.

BEST KIDS' SITE

Cartoon Network

www.cartoonnetwork.com

Cartoon Network understands that, while educational tools and hard facts are all very well for parents, what kids themselves really want is fun. To that end, its impressive roster of toons comes complete with games, animations and plenty of Flash; enough, in fact, to keep the average under-12 adequately occupied for hours on end. A multimedia-heavy portal that actually does its job.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

DISNEY ***www.disney.com***
It's 'Where The Magic Lives Online', apparently. With movie info, cartoons, games and Disneyland clips, it's an essential destination.

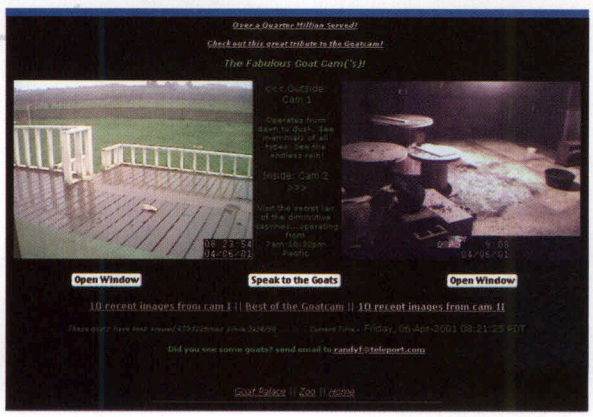
BOB THE BUILDER ***www.bobthebuilder.org***
The kids' phenomenon of the year was supported by a brilliantly-conceived site featuring games, songs and plenty of Flash.

BEST WEIRD SITE

Goat cam

www.teleport.com/~randyf/goatcam.html

Bear with us on this one. The Goat cam is a Web cam pointed, oddly enough, at a group of goats at a farm in the States. So far, so *Animal Hospital*: the real beauty here, however, is that you can 'interact' with the creatures in question by sending messages through your browser which are then flashed up on a display in their quarters. It might sound ridiculous, but it's been compelling enough to draw a quarter of a million visitors, which may well be a damning indictment of the Internet community in general. Other highlights on this increasingly odd site include spoof albums by the 'Goatles' (sample tracks: *All You Need Is Cud*, *Love Me Doe* and *I Want To Hold Your Hoof*) and a massive photo collection of the goats feeding, playing and, er, doing goat-type things. There are, believe it or not, people who visit this site every day to see what their favourite goat is up to and there's now even a Goat cam fan site at ***www.geocities.com/Area51/5446/teachings/fabulousgoat.html***. Stop it now; it's gone far enough already...



BEST KEYBOARD

Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro

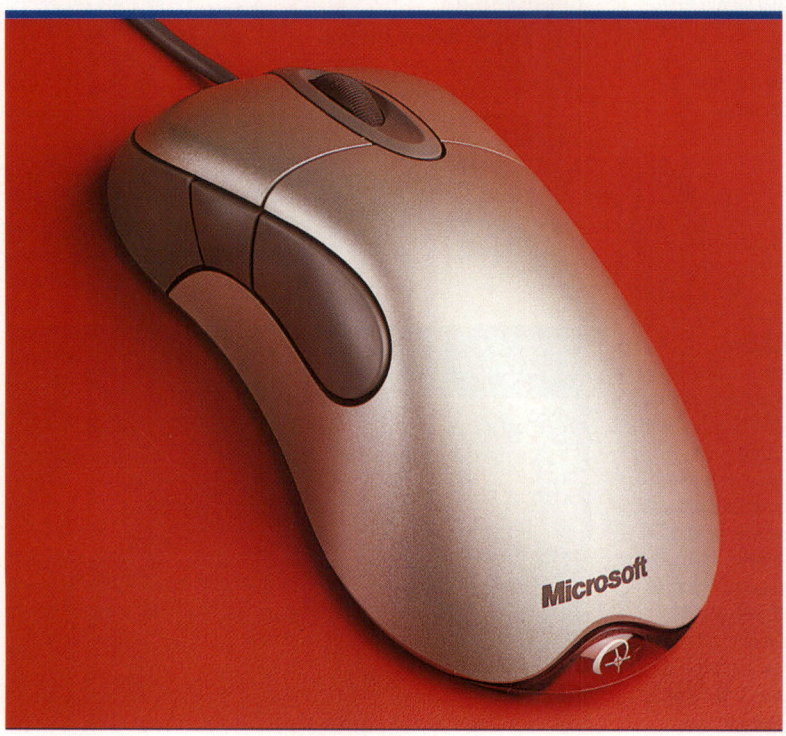
www.microsoft.com

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN ON THE subject of making the Internet a truly turn-key experience and Microsoft's 'Natural' keyboard is the nearest thing we've found to making that a reality. The secret is in the host of hot keys: 19 in all, which can be made to launch a browser, go back, forward, home, open a favourite...all with the single stab of a button. As if that were not enough, other hot keys can be made to open your email program, operate some of Windows' most popular functions and even act as the control pad for your PC's multimedia player. Where's the catch? You'll need to check that it's compatible with your choice of email client and browser; unsurprisingly, Microsoft's Internet software is covered, although to the company's credit we were pleased to find that it supports 'rival' products such as Eudora and Netscape (although in the case of the latter, only to v4.7). All that aside, the Natural is a delight to use, supports Windows ME and comes complete with two USB ports. What more could you want? Oh yes, the price – a measly £37. Buy one now.

BEST MOUSE

Microsoft Intellimouse

www.microsoft.com

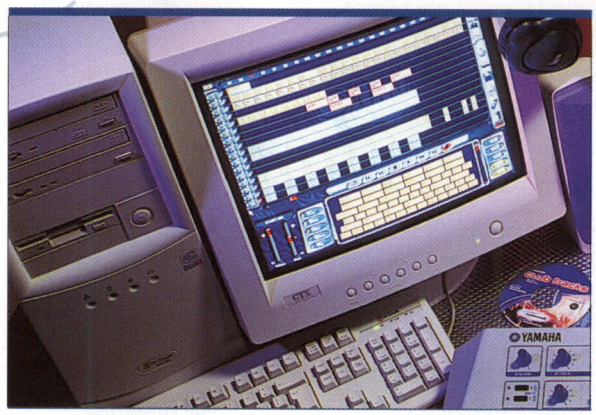


EVER THOUGHT ABOUT YOUR MOUSE? Ponder for a moment the hours that it spends under your hand during the day, manfully aiding your navigation around the Internet or through endless documents and programmes. Now ask yourself; is it a fit partner for the task? Even if you think that yours is, you must try Microsoft's Intellimouse. Cringe-making name aside, this simple device exposes rival, more complex efforts for the overdressed fops that they are. You get a USB connector to your PC or Mac, the necessary software on a disc, and a mouse. In itself, it looks nothing special; two click-pads on top separated by a scroll wheel, with two further pads moulded into the side. It's only when you tip the mouse over that you uncover its secret: no ball. In fact, the Intellimouse uses infrared to guide the cursor, so it stays accurate no matter how grimy your desktop. A brilliant mouse that's worth every penny of its £40.

BEST PC

Hi-Grade Pentium Pro 4

www.higrade.co.uk



POWERFUL, SUPER-FAST PCS HAVE FOR TOO LONG been beyond the pockets of the average home user. That's all changed with the release of the latest batch of customisable, sleek and simple-to-operate systems from rapidly-emerging manufacturer Hi-Grade. For a mere £1,000, the latest Pentium 4 technology will give you a whopping 1.3GHz of processing power, ideal for gaming, mixing or running complex applications – and with a 20Gb hard disk thrown in, this is a value-for-money pioneering system that deserves wider exposure. Proof that big isn't always better.

BEST WEBCAM

Logitech Quickcam Express

www.logitech.com

LOGITECH HAS ALWAYS LED THE WAY IN THE Webcam world, but with the £140 QuickCam Express the company has excelled itself. Not only does the QuickCam look great (which is more of an added bonus than a necessity), but its multiple functions make it far and away the market leader. Crystal clear streamed images make this a top-notch Webcam in its own right, but it can easily double up as a digital camera, a video camera for creating attachments to send to friends and family, and has a video conferencing facility. Not just a pretty face, but an all-in-one desktop to boot.

BEST MP3 PLAYER

Creative DAP Jukebox

www.creative.com

TRUTH IS, THERE HAVE BEEN MP3 PLAYERS THAT weren't worthy of the name. Behind the cutesy iMac-style casings and intriguing technology lay a shortage of storage capacity, rendering the players next to useless. Which is why Creative Lab's DAP strolls away with this award: this player boasts an extraordinary 6GB, which translates to just over 100 hours of music. If you're an average person in the UK, you can keep your entire collection of 150 CDs on a 400g device that's not that much larger than a single compact disc. It gets better: the DAP will handle any format you choose to throw at it and the £330 you invest will soon pay for itself.

BEST BROWSER

Internet Explorer 6

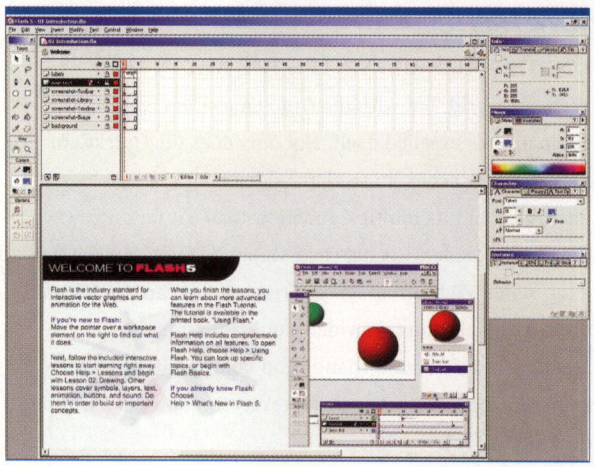
www.microsoft.com

YOU MIGHT BEGRUDGE BILL GATES HIS MILLIONS (make that billions), but you can't deny that he knows how to put a Web browser together. While Net purists will insist on carping on about Opera's independent capabilities, the truth is Explorer is simply more useable and a lot quicker than any other alternative. The latest version, available now, adds little to the traditional formula, but covers all the usual bases: it looks unobtrusive, organises your favourites sensibly and allows enviable levels of customisation. It also comes bundled with the best mail package around in Outlook Express and a wide choice of multimedia support systems.

BEST PLUG-IN

Flash 5

www.macromedia.com



THE WEB WAS AN EXTREMELY STAID EXPERIENCE before Flash came along. Macromedia's design tool par excellence allowed developers to add life to previously static sites, and the latest incarnation of the program has made surfing a more interactive experience than ever before. Flash 5 dominates the animations market, and it's not hard to see why. The effects, as witnessed on the Macromedia display site, are spectacular, and have quickly become a standard. A staggering 96 percent of Web users own a copy of Flash 5, and its use is increasingly essential: cartoons, moving graphics and snazzy intros have become a Web standard.

BEST ONLINE GAME

Half Life: Counter-Strike

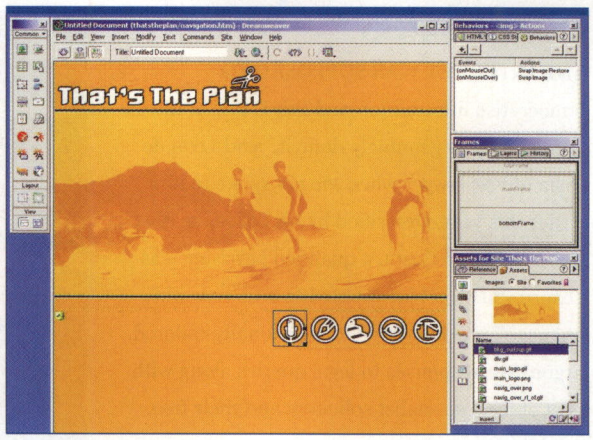
www.counter-strike.net

WHILE *QUAKE III* IS ARGUABLY THE MORE POPULAR online game, it is main rival *Counter-Strike* that has really captured the hearts and minds of the world's gamers. This is a strictly multi-player game and combines the thrill of shoot-em-ups with precise tactical decision-making. You'll find yourself as either a terrorist or counter-terrorist, fighting either to cause or prevent anarchy, with a host of bombs, missiles and guns at your disposal. Teamwork is essential, but the real beauty of *Counter-Strike* is that you can dip in and out of it at will, meaning you don't have to be a hardcore gamer in a darkened basement to enjoy its simple charms.

BEST SITE-BUILDING SOFTWARE

Dreamweaver 4

www.macromedia.com



WHEN BOTH PROFESSIONALS AND AMATEURS SWEAR so enthusiastically by a product, you can be sure you can trust it. So it is with Dreamweaver, the clear market leader in Web development software and a program which achieves the tricky balance between being easy enough for anyone to use and providing impressive results. After a few hours' practice, anyone with any degree of Web literacy will be able to put together a half-decent page; in time, Flash graphics, intricate coding and tables will be within your grasp. And the results are impressive: for something so accessible, the types of site you can create are reassuringly professional.

BEST FILTERING SOFTWARE

Net Nanny 4

www.netnanny.com

EVERY PARENT IS CONCERNED ABOUT WHERE THEIR child might wander on their Web travels. Filtering software quickly became the obvious answer to such worries and Net Nanny is the clear market leader. Its beauty lies in its constant updating: buy the program once and the list of 10,000-plus sites it blocks from your computer is updated, free of charge, in a regular series of Web downloads, so you can be sure of keeping one step ahead of pornographers and ne'er-do-wells. On top of that, there's a customisable list of banned search terms and tools to stop credit card details being entered. Perhaps you can buy peace of mind after all.

BEST MP3 SOFTWARE

Music Match 6

www.musicmatch.com

THE WEB IS BURSTING AT THE SEAMS WITH MP3 players and desktop jukeboxes, but the only one that includes the best bits of them all is Music Match – and, best of all, it's free. With Music Match, your every MP3 need is covered: not only can you play tunes on your desktop, you can burn CDs, create a customisable playlist and build an archive of tunes. It's fully compatible with major MP3 portables, looks great and shouldn't overly perplex the MP3 newcomer. The best trick Music Match has up its sleeve, however, is its in-built radio station: enter your favourite artists and it will play them 24 hours a day from your desktop.

@2001

BRIGHTEST SPARK

Freelawyer

www.freelawyer.co.uk

'THE INTERNET WAS SUPPOSED TO democratise information and this is one of the sites which has genuinely done it,' said Leon de Costa of Freelawyer when *the net* spoke to him earlier this year. Described by his colleague Alex Mehta – like de Costa, a qualified barrister – as 'Oxford PhD-level law written in a 12-year-old's language', Freelawyer gives individually-tailored, jargon-free responses to legal queries along with a list of local specialist solicitors and their free, no-obligation estimates of legal costs if the matter were to be taken further. A wonderful example of technology being used to make life a little better, righting wrongs for the little person and chasing justice for all.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

FRIENDS REUNITED

www.friendsreunited.co.uk

Look up your old school, leave a message, they'll forward on 'hello's from old school chums.

QUESTICO *www.questico.co.uk*

More than a thousand experts in any field you care to mention, at your beck and call: it's phone-a-friend on a global interactive scale.

BEST USE OF BROADBAND

Gameplay

www.gameplay.com

THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT WHO WILL benefit most from the upcoming widespread installation of ADSL: gamers. With faster connections, the 'ping' rate so crucial to effective online gaming should go through the roof, making virtual killing a reality for the ordinary home user. At the forefront of this revolution will be Gameplay, the long-standing games portal founded by Web entrepreneur Dylan Wilk back in 1986. Gameplay is a one-stop shop for the games-obsessed: you can play them, buy them and read reviews of them here. Let's hope the news that the site is up for sale doesn't impinge on its undoubted quality.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

GORILLAZ

www.gorillaz.com

Regardless of whether their music is to your taste, this Damon Albarn-fronted hip-hop collective have scored an online hit with their Flash-strewn animation site. Effortlessly cool.

BEST ONLINE EVENT

Big Brother

www.channel4.com/bigbrother

LAST JULY WHEN IT HIT OUR SCREENS (computer and TV) could anyone have suspected how it would become the summer's topic of conversation? 'A load of old pish!' was the general consensus at the start; by the second week even *The Guardian*'s columnists were hooked: 'Hurrah for *Big Brother*. However did we fill the excruciatingly dull summer evenings before Channel 4 whooshed to our rescue?'

The UK site was the eighth most-visited in the country in a month, with an astounding 700,000 unique users logging on to see how Craig, Anna and the crew were whiling away the hours. And if the popularity of March's *Celebrity Big Brother* is anything to go by, this summer's event is going to break all records, both online and off.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

NAPSTER ***www.napster.com***

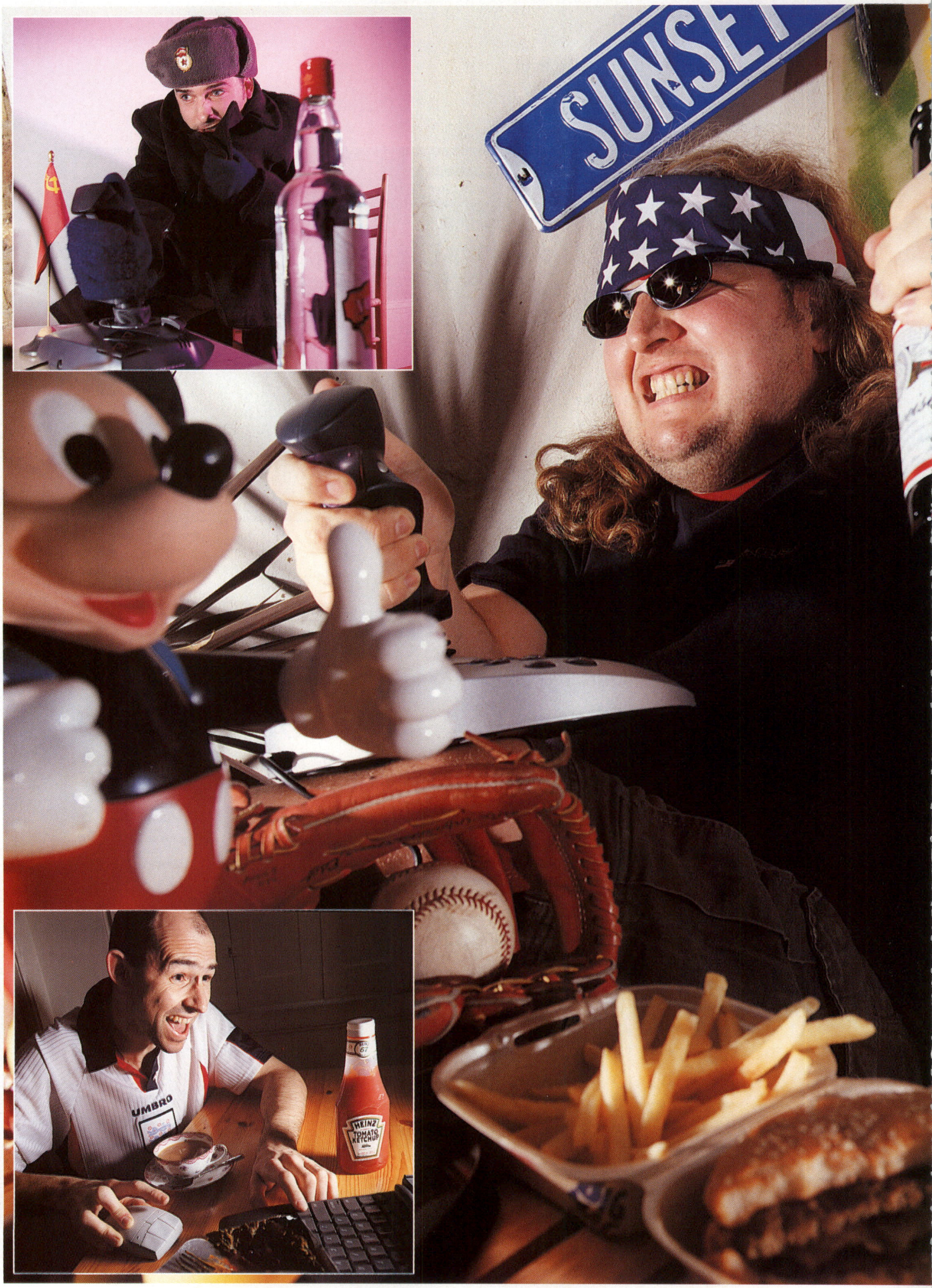
The Napster debacle took up more column inches than any other Net phenomenon this year and the fallout has both positive and negative aspects for surfers. While there's no more free music since the plugs were effectively pulled, the use of the Web as a democratising tool has a long-lasting resonance.

BIGGEST WASTE OF MONEY

Boo.com

www.boo.com

WE HATE IT WHEN THE INTERNET IS given a bad name. There's nothing the popular press likes more than to hop on a bandwagon and then try to steer it off the road. Such has been the case with the Internet in the last year, mainly due to rampant overspending on sites which offer nothing of any value and irritate the hell out of you for good measure. Which brings us nicely to Boo.com. It spent outlandishly on ridiculous advertising –remember the annoying American joggers? – and developing a site stuffed full of 3D technology which most people's computers couldn't even recognise. Boo.com symbolised for many the Net at its smoke-and-mirrors worst. Marks & Spencer would have been happy to recoup the outlay in sales; a smallish sportswear retailer like Boo had no chance, particularly when its name became a byword for failure. The Official Receiver compiled a report which put the bill at £178m.



WORDS: ROB WAUGH; PICTURES: STEVE ORINO

GLOBAL WARFARE

With broadband around the corner, there's no excuse for not getting into online gaming. After all, the rest of the world's already at it...

Ever considered online gaming? Maybe you're happy with a post-pub solo session on the PlayStation. Maybe the whole idea of fragging over the Web leaves you cold. The chances are, though, if you've tried the odd round of online Quake, your set-up has left you sorely disappointed.

Broadband Internet connections are revolutionising the way people play video games. Connect via ADSL and you can plunge into an online world, or an online battle, in microseconds. The games move smoothly, with no time-lag. Your can talk to the people you're playing with through microphone headsets. You can even download a game in weekly episodes, just like it's a soap opera.

And in the blink of an eye, you can grab free new levels, free versions of your favourite games – or even whole new zero-cost games. Most important of all, you can win. Play *Quake 3* through a 56k modem, and you're just going to be a chugging, slow-moving source of free kills for packs of ADSLd-up predators racing around the levels like cougars on speed.

You and 50,000 others will be able to form a virtual town with jobs, bars and even romance

And it's not just connection speeds that are changing. As fast Net access spreads, developers are discovering new ways for people to play together. A recent free add-on for the cutesy creature-evolving simulator *Creatures 3: Docking Station*, allows the 'Norns' which you breed to make their own decisions about whether they stay in your hard drive or not.

Leave Docking Station running and your hordes of carefully-bred Norns may find the permanently open ADSL connection too tempting, and they'll just up sticks and migrate en masse. Or you could come back and find that your hard drive is filled with other people's Norns.

The developers imagine that some gamers will set up their hard drives as hospitals or schools and leave their connection as a permanent open door to sick or stupid Norns. But knowing gamers, it's equally likely that people will be manufacturing Norn abattoirs or prisons.

It is this (sometimes warped) sense of community that makes online gaming a different prospect from solo play. In *The Sims Online*, out later this year, you and 50,000 other people will form a virtual town, complete with jobs, bars and even romance. You can talk to anyone, go anywhere, do anything. The developers anticipate Sim weddings before too long.

Even in bloodthirsty shoot 'em ups like *Quake 3*, users form into 'clans' to fight together in teams. Deathmatch game servers are usually accessible for free (although more about that later) using the games' 'Find server' function. People use known servers to meet up and fight together, or they use the game's chat option to get to know rivals, before they spend the next 10 minutes blowing each other into piles of smoking mince.

But to really savour the power of broadband, you should head for games which are 'massively multiplayer' – persistent online worlds where thousands of player-characters 'live', and where your character 'sleeps' while you're not playing. You just have to buy a game disc (usually about £30), then you've got unlimited access to a complex, organic online society where you choose to be whoever you like, and do whatever you want. Online worlds can become so much like the real world that fashions can spread through them. Or wars.

One of the most popular multiplayer games is the long-running online swords-and-sorcery world *Ultima*. At the moment a character called Oceane is making a name »

for herself. Not by slaying dragons, or any of the other heroic stuff that people tend to do in *Ultima*. She's doing it thanks to her skill as an interior designer. Oceane has been playing the game for ages, and got a reputation for doing up houses rather nicely, so she started to charge other characters fees of between 15,000 and 350,000 groats of in-game money to decorate their pads. It's a real sign of status on the Europa server (or 'shard') to have your house decorated by her. By day, Oceane is a primary school teacher.

But at least she's only charging them game money. Some items in the 3D online fantasy world *Everquest* have changed hands in online auctions for real money, with people paying up to £100 for precious magical swords or armour.

One player has made a name for herself with her skills as an interior designer

Of course, you don't need us to tell you that someone who is prepared to pay £100 for a magic sword in a video game is clinically insane, but it's an indicator of how engrossing a broadbanded-up online world can become. It's like a cross-breed between a vast, three-dimensional chat room and a game. And with broadband now offering the potential for you to use a microphone to talk to your fellow players in real time, newer games can feel like acting in your own TV series. And there are already 'massively multiplayer' online worlds where you can play as *Star Wars* characters, as historical figures, as City traders, or just about anything else you please. Prepare for all hell to break loose in schools once Electronic Arts' online Harry Potter world goes live sometime next year.

There are online worlds in the works which will even call you on your mobile phone to tell you if something important is happening while your character is asleep – ie when you're away from your PC. Of course, if this happens in the office, you're going to find it hard to convince your boss that you need to leave immediately to prevent your character being devoured by trolls.

But if you want a traditional one-on-one, they're easy to find as well. Utilities like GameSpy, available for free, will find you opponents to play against in seconds, and they'll work with just about any game. People have a misconception that you are only able to play shoot 'em ups or *Dungeons and Dragons*-style games online, but in fact there's a whole world of football, racing and strategy games, all playable online.

The games that always top the online charts, though, are the shoot 'em ups. There are hundreds of thousands of players online at any time you care to log on, all playing *Quake 3*, *Unreal Tournament*, *Half Life* and *Delta Force*, among others. And things have gone long beyond the simple 'first to 20 kills wins' formula. You can download home-made modifications ('mods' if you're a pro) which will allow you to play counter-terrorist strategy missions (*Half Life: Counter-Strike*), or to put dead players in prison to be freed by team-mates (*Quake 3 Jailbreak*), or just quadruple your rate of fire to turn games into berserk, nightmarish orgies of violence (*Quake 3: Excessive Overkill*). The only question now is: where first?

THE INS-AND-OUTS OF ONLINE GAMING

HOW DO I DO IT?»

For the moment, online gaming is pretty much exclusively a PC affair. Dreamcasts include a 33.6k modem, but rumour has it Sega will withdraw support for online Dreamcast gaming before too long – it's simply costing them too much. And with PlayStation 2, there's a lot of conflicting messages. It should be online before the end of the year, but Sony refuse to clarify matters.

When it comes to PC gaming, the hardware you'll need depends very much on what games you want to play. To play graphical masterpieces like *Quake 3* or *Counter-Strike* online, you'll need a pretty heavy-duty PC. If you're still holding on to that old chug-o-matic Pentium II, though, you can still play online, so long as you choose less graphic-intensive games like the old 2D version of *Ultima*. To play the newest games, kit up with a PC running at 700MHz or higher, 128Mb of RAM and a graphics card. It's advisable to tool yourself with a utility like Gamespy, which seeks out servers for the game you're playing and then adapts to the games on your hard drive.

Dreamcast: an uncertain future?

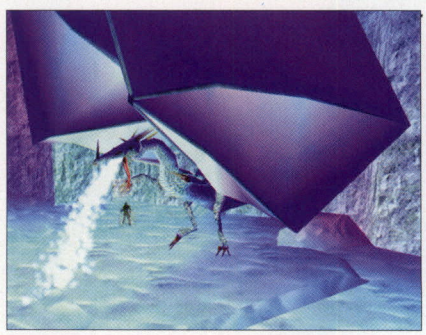
With most newer games, though, it's even simpler. Most will have a 'Gamespy'-type utility built in, so that all you have to do is click on 'Internet game', and it'll come up with a list of servers. Choose servers with a low 'ping' number to get a fast connection. Just double click and the game should do the rest.

OUR CHOICE OF THE BEST

HALF LIFE: COUNTER-STRIKE

Although it originated on the Web, Counter-Strike is now available as a low-priced add-on pack for Half Life, itself now available as an unbelievably popular budget title. It's a counter-terrorist take on the shoot 'em up genre, with players dividing into teams of terrorists, and counter-terrorist operatives.

www.planethalflife.com



EVERQUEST

One of the most popular online games at the moment, *Everquest* has just received a sparkly new update called *Velious* with a lot more territories to explore. The 3D graphics are absolutely superb, too. Expect elves, magic swords, hordes of goblins, and friendly groups of adventurers to go off on quests with.

www.everquest.com

RED ALERT 2

Ideal for people without heavy-end 3D cards in their PCs, this is a classic strategy effort. There's a massive number of units to get to grips with, huge tank battalions to command and nifty sci-fi gizmos like giant electric coils that fry anyone who walks near them. Check out people's online rankings before engaging in open war, though – there are some *very* good players out there.

westwood.ea.com/games/ccuniverse/redalert2

ONLINE GAMES AROUND – AND WHERE TO TRY THEM OUT...

DESPERADOS

Desperados is a top-down cowboy thriller where you engage in *High Noon*-style showdowns and face-offs near the Mexican border in turn-of-the-century America. It's not an online game as such, but the makers promise that they'll keep updating the software with downloadable episodes to keep the action going.

www.desperados-game.com

EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE

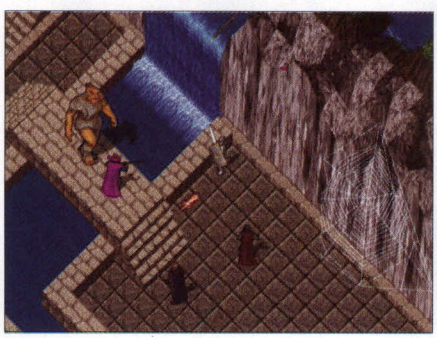
This upcoming strategy game is based on the *Dune* novels, and it's from Westwood, the famous development team behind the *Command* and *Conquer* games. It's complex, beautiful to look at, and will be a massive online hit. If you order it early, you get a special early version with a couple of otherwise unavailable units.

westwood.ea.com

QUAKE 3: ARENA

One of the most successful online games of all time, *Quake 3* is available in a huge variety of modified versions to suit all tastes. We recommend *Rocket Arena* and *Jailbreak*, but there are literally thousands available for free download. Even 'straight' *Quake 3* is still massively popular.

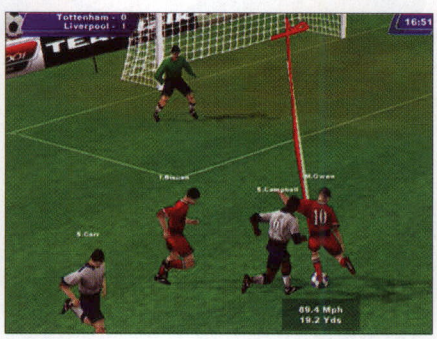
www.quakearena.com



ULTIMA ONLINE

Now 3D at last, this one is the dinosaur of fantasy role-playing games online, and is filled with legions of fans, some of who have been playing for years. It's slightly less graphic-intensive than a lot of games, and there's a massive world to explore, with thousands of adventures to get involved with. Careful, though – it is a little nerdy.

www.uo.com



ANCO PLAYASMANAGER

This is one of the first online football management games, and it's already a massive hit. It's not massively graphic-intensive, so you don't need a super-powerful PC to play, and it really is a superb way to test out your management mettle against a host of other online fans. Become the next Sven-Goran now.

www.playasmanager.com

PHANTASY STAR ONLINE

No-one's sure how long Sega are going to keep supporting Dreamarena, their online portal, but you should have enough time to complete this sci fi drama. It's the world's first online console RPG, and it's a blinder. You meet up with three other people in the game's chatrooms, then head off into beast-infested lands for fun...

www.sonicteam.com/pso/english

1NSANE

Monster-truck racing action with a superb eight-player online racing option. Finding servers can be a bit of a bind, but if you're willing to host one and wait for players to come to you, 1nsane is a blast. It's dumb as you like, but it runs at extremely high speed and there's a lot of fun to be had ramming other racers off the road. Not just for rednecks – this will appeal to everyone.

www.codemasters.com/insane

DELTA FORCE LAND WARRIOR

Stupid computer opponents mean that there's not much point in playing this offline, but online it's a superbly strategic real-world shooter, with brilliantly open levels, sniper rifles and superbly destructive fragmentation grenades. It's probably one of the most 'real' of the shooters on the market today. Try a demo on the official site and get a feel for the game before you play.

www.deltaforce.com

CREATURES 3: DOCKING STATION

Download the Docking Station add-on for *Creatures 3* to experience one of the most surreal online games ever devised. Norns (the Creatures you breed in the game) can find 'warp portals' which lead out of your hard drive and into other computers. Leave it running in the background, and if your PC is looking enticing you'll have a Gremlins-style plague...

www.creatures.net/dockingstation

Supermarket sweep

Online grocery retailers claim they're smartening up their act, so is it time to kiss goodbye to the shopping trolley?

SURFING TO SHOP OR SHOPPING FOR Surf...that is the question. The days of trudging down to the supermarket and pacing up and down the aisles looking for your favourite packet of biscuits could be a thing of the past. Online shopping means the big chains can now offer something like 50 percent of the goods you'd find in-store at the click of a mouse.

But that ability to order your groceries from home has raised a dilemma for some shoppers: what you gain in buying on-screen you lose in not being able to view the wider range of alternatives at the bricks and mortar site. When you can't see the goodies in front of you, you can't check their freshness and sell-by dates. Sceptics also claim the time taken to register and place an order can take just as long as physically shopping, on the first occasion at least.

Online supermarkets appeared a couple of years ago, but it's taken a while for them to refine and expand their services to become anything near comprehensive. So if you've made up your mind whether to forgo the pleasures of trying to steer a trolley that seems to have a mind of its own around a real supermarket, what next? We suggest you shop around. Most, though not all, of the top names have a Web service, and delivery areas are widespread enough to give most shoppers a greater choice of online stores than physical ones, so it's a good idea to take a peek inside their virtual doors to see what they've got on their virtual shelves.

We went shopping with five supermarkets: ASDA, Iceland, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Waitrose. We would have checked out Somerfield and Safeway, too, except Somerfield's 24/7 service became an 0/0 service last year (it went out of business) and Safeway doesn't have an online ordering facility, although apparently they're bearing it in mind.

We ordered roughly the same amount and type of groceries from each – see our shopping list, below – though there were slight variations. For instance, there's no way you can order the ingredients for a Raymond Blanc-style dinner party from Iceland; getting Wayne and Waynetta round for a pizza pig-out was more their style. »

What we bought Two cans of beer, French stick, loaf of bread, two packets of biscuits, after-dinner mints, washing powder, bleach, toothpaste, 12 free-range eggs, can of beans, bran flakes, chicken breast, packet of soup, pizza, butter, two packs of cheese, prawns, leeks, broccoli, mangoes, bananas, apples, potatoes, garlic.

WORDS: RICHARD TIPPETT; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT

Baxters
Organic
Broccoli and Potato
Soup
ANNA'S
GINGER THINS
IDEAL
HANDY
TWIN TUBS

On entering a supermarket site, the first thing to do is make sure it delivers in your area. You'll find a box where you can tap in your postcode to find out immediately whether or not you're in luck. A sensible second step is to have a look around the aisles before registering, to find out whether the store has the right products for you. Nearly all supermarket sites will let you do this, with the exception of Tesco, which makes you sign its registration form before you're allowed to view the various victuals.

Once you've chosen your supermarket, you can look forward to spending about 10 minutes going through the rigmarole of registering. They'll want such details as your name, address, telephone numbers and choice of payment method.

It's best to make a list before you start shopping, otherwise you'll be jumping backwards and forwards and your order will go pear-(not to say apple and banana) shaped. The sites lead you through departments, aisles and finally shelves, where you click what you want and see it (hopefully) drop into your virtual trolley. Some sites are better than others at showing you exactly what you've bought.

Also, bear in mind that what you order online isn't necessarily what you'll end up getting. You'll find that on an order of around £40-£45, probably half a dozen items will be 'substitutes' for what you wanted. Or the items will not be included at all due to 'lack of availability'. To be fair to the supermarket sites, all of them make these changes clear on their itemised delivery notes. So if you're expecting a lovely box of Twilight choccies, don't be surprised if an equivalent number of Mars bars turn up in their place. If you don't want the substitute items, you can at least refuse and have them deducted from your bill. The Sainsbury's driver was especially helpful in bringing this to our attention.

What you order online isn't necessarily what you'll end up getting

All of the sites offer a 'product search', in case there's a particular item you can't find by browsing the shelves. If you type in 'soup', for instance, the site comes up with a whole batch of options, such as fresh, tinned, packet and home-made.

Once you've completed your first order, you're known to the supermarket, so with each subsequent request you can opt to call up 'your favourites', and the site will reproduce what you had last time, saving you the bother of starting from scratch.

It all sounds pretty blissful and indeed it can be, as long as you bear in mind a few important things. For instance, you may love your Waitrose high street store, but to get the benefits of its grocery online service you, or a member of your family, have to work in a company with at least 300 computers; that way you're entitled to use Waitrose@Work. Its home delivery service is still its infancy, with pilot schemes underway in selected areas and more planned for the near future – see ***www.waitrosedeliver.com***.

If you're planning to use Iceland, there's a minimum order value of £40. And ASDA is smart enough to lure you in with the promise of free delivery, but only with your first order. After that it'll cost you £3.50. Tesco, meanwhile, is rather economical about telling you about its £5 delivery charge: it's hidden in the small print.

Not that a fiver's going to bother some of its snobbier customers. Tesco has recently started piloting a service in Norfolk which ditches the company's well-known white and blue vans in favour of green unmarked Range Rovers, the theory being that neighbours twitching behind curtains will think the latest fashion shoes from South Molton Street are being delivered rather than the week's groceries. Tesco is using 40,000 vehicles fitted with refrigeration units and tinted glass to deliver pizzas and frozen fries. The only clue that the cars belong to a supermarket is a small badge carried on the side.

Without going to those extremes, you might still imagine that when you've ordered your online groceries, someone will turn up at your front door with the goodies all neatly sealed in a couple of boxes. Unfortunately, our experience shattered that little dream. In every case, the deliveries were made in five or six extremely normal carrier bags, showing all the signs of an extremely normal visit to the supermarket itself. And in four out of the five cases, the stuff arrived up to half an hour late. They must have had problems at the checkout. Which would be pretty normal, too.

OTHER RECOMMENDED FOOD SITES

Track down those elusive ingredients and have them delivered to your door

GOURMET WORLD

www.gourmet-world.co.uk

Award-winning store dedicated to culinary indulgence. Order £50 worth of such goodies as foie gras, truffle oil, champagne and fruits in wine here and delivery is free across mainland Britain.

MACDONALD'S

www.smokedproduce.co.uk

A very smart site, with some of the best smoked food on the Net, including fish fresh from the Highlands, cheeses, game and meats, including alligator and ostrich. Simon MacDonald supplies his fish to the likes of Harrods, Concorde and the Gleneagles Hotel, so you're in good company.

BRISTOL SWEET MART

bristol-sweet-mart.co.uk

Hundreds of exotic foods and spices from around the world, including West Indian, Mexican, Indian and Chinese, and ranging from herbs, tinned goods and breads, to pickles, pastes and dry ingredients. The place to buy your callaloo in brine, if you're that way inclined...

MacDonald's: exquisite smoked foods, from the traditional Scottish to the exotic

FRESH FOOD

www.freshfood.co.uk

Mind-blowingly huge selection of organic produce, offering everything from meats, fruit and veg, to frozen foods, baby food and all the store cupboard standards, and hundreds of wines, beers and spirits. Subscription service commits you to a fortnightly delivery of various values, but you get to choose what goes into it each time.

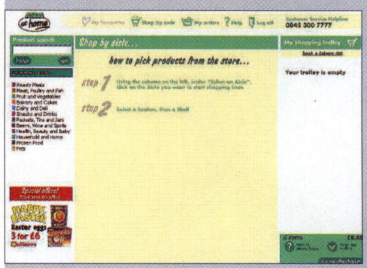
THE FOODSTORE

www.thefoodstore.co.uk

Online wing of South London delicatessen chain, Mise-en-place, takes temptation a step further with the sensible inclusion of colour photos of fabulous deli and luxury foods, including organic and gluten-free variants, plus top-notch food gifts. Flat delivery rate of £4.95 throughout Britain.

HOW DO THE SUPERMARKETS COMPARE?

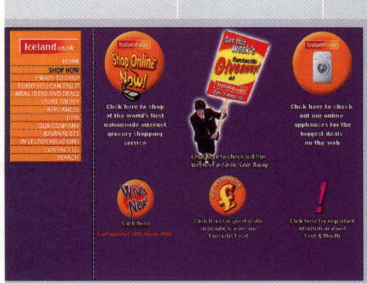
STORE	EASE OF ORDERING	TIME TAKEN TO ORDER	NUMBER OF ITEMS ORDERED	PRICE OF ORDER	DELIVERY TIME	SUBSTITUTIONS AND NON-DELIVERED ITEMS	VERDICT
ASDA	★★★★★	75 minutes	26	£38.72	24 hours (as requested)	0 substitutions; 2 n/d	★★☆☆☆



www.asda.com

- You can visit the store before registering.
- Free delivery on first order only, but £3.50 thereafter on all orders below £100.
- Basic Web site, with drab design, though the labelling of aisles in the left-hand of screen is neat and tidy.
- Site kept crashing, making the order incredibly slow and laborious. ASDA told us it was experiencing problems with the site 'because the server's not up to it'.
- Nice touch when ordering wine: a description of your choice comes up on screen.
- No After Eight-type chocs, so we ordered a block of dark organic instead.
- Excellent visual display of trolley, the best of all the sites: shows unprompted everything you've bought so far.
- You can change your order or cancel up to 5pm on the day before your order is due to be delivered.

STORE	EASE OF ORDERING	TIME TAKEN TO ORDER	NUMBER OF ITEMS ORDERED	PRICE OF ORDER	DELIVERY TIME	SUBSTITUTIONS AND NON-DELIVERED ITEMS	VERDICT
ICELAND	★★★★☆	35 minutes	21	£39.58	24 hours (as requested)	3 substitutions; 2 n/d	★★★☆☆



www.iceland.co.uk

- Doesn't take long to order as there's less on offer. In the cheese section, there's only cheddar. The veg section has only potatoes, salad and onions. And in fruit just two, bananas and apples (but the bananas didn't arrive).
- Free delivery to 97 percent of the population, but total order must be £40 or more – we ordered over £40, but when non-delivered items were taken into account it dropped below the threshold and we weren't charged.
- Is part of the Which?-approved service.
- The site has nicely presented headings on left of screen; frozen products are blue, fresh are yellow and groceries are red,which means you don't have to keep going back to Departments and Aisles as you do with others.
- Just before you pay, there's a final checklist to make sure you haven't forgotten anything, and a little box so you can let them know if you've got a really scary dog which might frighten their delivery personnel.

STORE	EASE OF ORDERING	TIME TAKEN TO ORDER	NUMBER OF ITEMS ORDERED	PRICE OF ORDER	DELIVERY TIME	SUBSTITUTIONS AND NON-DELIVERED ITEMS	VERDICT
SAINSBURY'S	★★★☆☆	one hour	26	£51.18 inc £5 delivery	24 hours (as requested)	5 substitutions; 1 n/d	★★★☆☆

www.sainsburystoyou.co.uk

- Smart-looking screen display with orange banner and delectable fruit and vegetables.
- To bag an item you need to perform two functions with the mouse; click on 'quantity', then 'add to trolley' rather than it happening automatically with the single word 'add'.
- When you've ordered something it automatically says 'in your trolley' on that product.
- There's no on-screen bill where you can review your purchases.
- Bananas had an unripe/ripe choice; the only store to include this.
- There's a huge choice under Biscuits, so it helps to know what you want before you start looking.

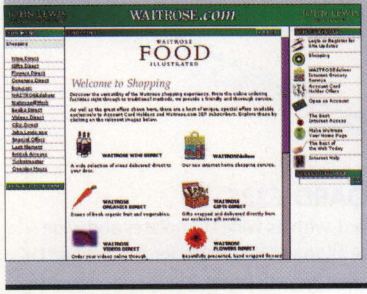
STORE	EASE OF ORDERING	TIME TAKEN TO ORDER	NUMBER OF ITEMS ORDERED	PRICE OF ORDER	DELIVERY TIME	SUBSTITUTIONS AND NON-DELIVERED ITEMS	VERDICT
TESCO	★★★☆☆	55 minutes	26	£54.17 inc £5 delivery	24 hours (as requested)	7 substitutions; 0 n/d	★★★★☆

TOP SITE

www.tesco.co.uk

- Rather laboured registering process before you can view what's on display.
- The department-aisle-shelf formula wasn't too smooth a presentation on screen.
- Nice touches on the top of your ordering display include a 'Don't forget' reminder (gravy with your roast, for instance) and recipe ideas.
- In the checkout, green 'available' boxes and blue 'unavailable' boxes makes choosing a delivery slot easier.
- For price, choice and quality of service, the best site around, despite several gripes..
- On delivery you get Computers for Schools vouchers and the clearest delivery note of the lot: you see instantly which products have been substituted or not delivered.
- Had the highest amount of substituted items (over a quarter). Of these, one of the 'extra large mangoes' was actually extra small and cost a whopping £1.60 more than the two we'd originally ordered.

STORE	EASE OF ORDERING	TIME TAKEN TO ORDER	NUMBER OF ITEMS ORDERED	PRICE OF ORDER	DELIVERY TIME	SUBSTITUTIONS AND NON-DELIVERED ITEMS	VERDICT
WAITROSE	★★★★☆	30 minutes	28	£43.69	24 hours (as requested)	0 substitutions; 0 n/d	★★★★☆



www.waitrose.com/atwork

- No delivery charge.
- Type in your user name and a password and you're away.
- Easy ordering on left of screen with 'aisles' and 'actions'.
- The bill's not up on the screen as you're ordering.
- When you 'review trolley' the products are in alphabetical order, rather than last product ordered.
- On delivery, this was the only supermarket to have no substitutions or non-deliveries.
- Chilled and frozen products arrive in chill-boxes because they might be hanging around in a company's reception area for a few hours. You can take them home and return asap.
- Only available in companies with 300 or more computers – a full home service is in development.

LOMO CAMERA £42

Join the world of Lomo photography and things may never be the same again... Your prints will be sent to you, plus they'll be posted online where you can keep them, share them, delete them... The possibilities are endless. ***www2.lomo.com***

CUFFLINKS £64

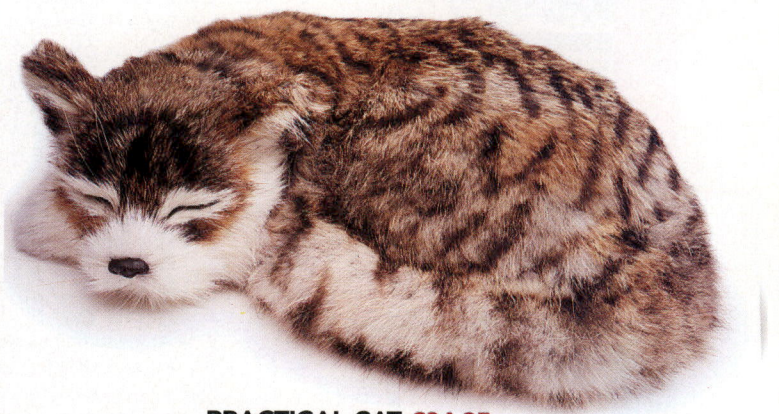
Paul Smith is but one of the high-profile designers featured at the aptly-named ***www.luxlook.com***. If you're feeling flush and want to treat someone, or (better still) want to treat yourself, pay the site a visit. Delivery in 2 days, free p&p.

Retailtherapy»

:// This month we give you trees, cats, cufflinks – oh, and the moon (but no stars or sky; sorry)

SHOWER RADIO £14.95

If you can't bear to be parted from your music for even a second, log on to ***www. paramountzone.com*** for this bathing essential and drown out your tuneless singing in the shower with a radio. Delivery in 2 days; p&p £1.95.



PRACTICAL CAT £24.95

Curled up, gently sleeping – and, er, that's about all it does. Quite what practical application it has is anyone's guess, but this friendly feline is strokeable enough. Available from ***www.gizmoandwidget.com***; £3 p&p, delivery in 7 days.

SURFBOARD £325

This Pipedreams Hybrid shortboard, with its wider templates and wide swallow tails, is a great performance all-rounder, suitable for the average UK conditions. Visit ***www.boardriders.co.uk*** for your board sports requirements.

WORDS: CLAIRE MCHATTIE; PHOTOGRAPHY: NICK WRIGHT

PIECE OF THE MOON £16.75

Imagine – one acre of the moon to call your very own! You may not be able to visit very often (if at all: think of the travelling costs) but still, a slice of cream cheese all to yourself... Allow 28 days for delivery. ***www.moonestates.com***

BONSAI TREE FROM £15

These gorgeous Bonsai are both a work of art and consuming hobby. Find all you need at the excellent ***www.bonsaizbonsai.co.uk*** and you, too, can become a Bonsai master... Items delivered in a week, p&p varies.

TOP BUY

SUNGLASSES £95

This pair of D & G sunglasses really are the only shades to hide behind this summer. Stroll on down to ***www.marcolin.com*** and take a look at what's on offer.

SIMPLE GUIDELINES FOR PAINLESS ONLINE PURCHASING

TOP TIPS FOR ONLINE SHOPPING»

CHECK THAT THE SITE IS SECURE

A small padlock will appear in the bottom left of your browser to show that you can safely send credit card details through the site. Your Web browser will also tell you whether a site is secure or not when you enter it.

SHOP WITH BRAND-NAME COMPANIES

As with shopping in the real world, you're better off with a company you've actually heard of – and these days, most big name brands own their Web addresses (so you can be sure that ***www.marksandspencer.com*** is, in fact, M&S).

PRINT THE CONTRACT

This is the only permanent record of your purchase, so make sure you keep it, along with your order number, billing address and other details. And here's a fact to put your mind at rest: if it's a UK site, you have the same consumer rights as you do in the high street.

NEVER SEND ANYTHING BY EMAIL

Don't send card details by email – it can be intercepted.

CHECK DELIVERY TIMES AND CHARGES

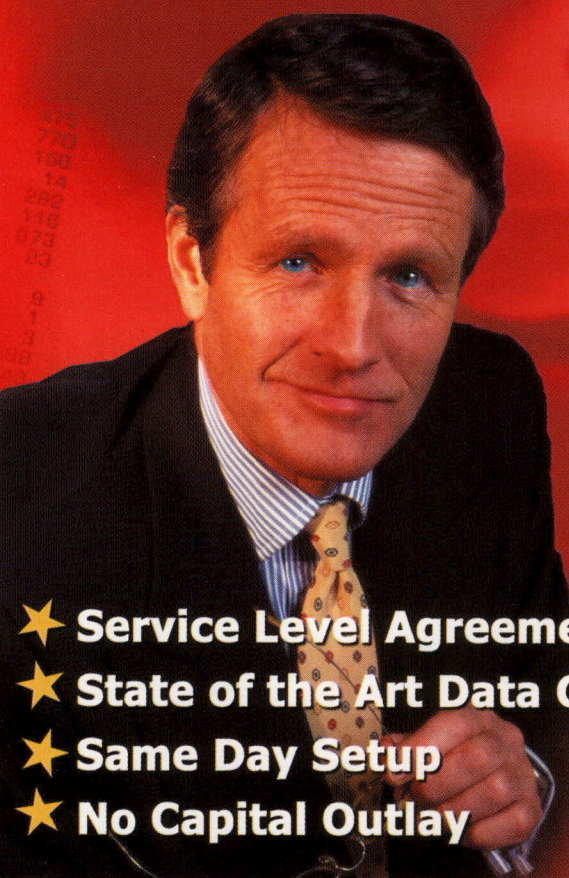
Companies should tell you the delivery charge, if there is one, on their site. If you're in the Highlands and Islands or Ireland, you may find free delivery doesn't apply.

IF IT GOES WRONG, DON'T WORRY

Contrary to scare stories, online shopping is safer and very often cheaper than traditional methods – and it's in the store's interest to sort out problems quickly.

dedicated servers

A Commitment to Success



- Service Level Agreement
- State of the Art Data Centre
- Same Day Setup
- No Capital Outlay

Are you outgrowing virtual hosting? Running into extra costs for high bandwidth use, more domains and email? Does the server itself seem slow and inflexible? Does your web designer keep saying there are so many things you could be doing if only you had more speed and space, and access to the 'workings' of the server? Your accountant won't let you spend a fortune on leased lines and computers. Maybe you don't have the technical staff to run your own network anyway. Well, you have no choice but to put up with virtual hosting, right?

Wrong. The serious solution to web hosting is a dedicated server, and it's within your reach now. You can benefit from high value Service Level Agreements just like the biggest players in your industry. You can enjoy the speed and flexibility of your own server in one of the country's leading Data Centres. You can even choose a server that's as technically simple to operate as virtual hosting, but without the restrictions. Your web designer will be happy.

So will your accountant, because dedicated servers cost less than you think. In fact, they can even work out cheaper than your existing virtual hosting arrangements. You get all the flexibility, all the control, all the speed and room for growth, and all at NO CAPITAL COST. Interested? Call us now.

Additional services such as co-location, system monitoring, firewalls, security services, system backups, managed system administration also available, contact us for details.

LINUX SERVERS

The industry standard operating system for web hosting and Internet services. RedHat Linux configured and running on one of our high speed servers. Apache, Sendmail, Perl, CGI and FTP configured and running as standard.

from £99.99 to £449.99 per month

WINDOWS SERVERS

Ideal for MSCP's, MCSE's, Visual Basic programmers, projects that require Active Server Pages, SQL or office components. Windows 2000 or NT installed & configured. DNS, IIS and MS Frontpage Server Extensions included as standard.

from £199.99 to £549.99 per month

SINGLE SITE SERVERS

A unique product that's as easy to use as a virtual server, but on a standalone dedicated web server. Includes the easy to use Virtual Control Panel 2001, 24 hour technical support by e-mail and phone - all hosted in our state of the art data centre facility.

£99.99 per month FREE SETUP

COBALT RAQ SERVERS

The high end "web-in-a-box" solution. Easy to use, no jargon or systems know-how required. Ideal for web designers, resellers, entrepreneurs etc. Add virtual servers, configure e-mail addresses, activate autoresponders over the Internet all in real time.

from £99.99 to £199.99 per month

part of the Host Europe group of companies

0115 9170000

www.dedicated-servers.co.uk

PRICES EXCLUDE VAT AND SETUP. ALL TRADEMARKS ARE THE REGISTERED PROPERTY OF THEIR RESPECTIVE OWNERS.

WHAT WEBSITE?

The Best of the Web

@ CHANNELS://

MUSIC 58
Reckon you could make it as a pop star? You need help…

MOVIES 60
Swot up on films past and present with the cream of review sites

TRAVEL 64
Online travel guides to give you the inside info on your destination

SPORT 68
Ah, the click of leather on willow… the Internet's best cricket sites

HEALTH 70
Soothing sites for parents worried about baby's health

LEARNING 72
Online encylopedias to free-up valuable space on your bookshelf

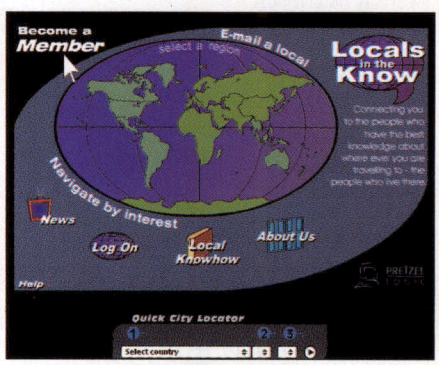
MONEY 74
Sharpen up your investments skills with advice from those in the know

HOMES & GARDENS 76
Everything for the garden, from plants and sheds, to advice and gazebos

THE DIRECTORY 78
Looking for the best sites? Don't waste time searching – just check out our list of addresses

MUSIC Web sites to help aspiring pop stars on their journey to chartdom

MOVIES Turn yourself into a film buff



TRAVEL Do your holiday homework

FOCUS:// How to be a pop star

'Fame! I'm gonna live forever...'

You, too, can learn how to fly (high!) with these guides to being a pop star

You'll be running a pub by the time you're 30...

@ If you have to bookmark one...

POPSTARS

www.popstarsonline.net ★★★★★

There can't be many people who are still unaware of the Popstars phenomenon, and the band's official Web site is equally as enthralling as the TV show. Whereas most teen bands have an online presence that stretches to listing their favourite sweets, the sizeable powers behind Hear'Say have made sure that not only are fans of the band well catered for, but budding Myleenes or Noels are given all the practical advice they could possibly need.

Getting straight down to it, the How To... section begins with recording and publishing deals, with the emphasis on the all-important royalty rates (anyone who says they aren't in the pop business for the money is either lying or insane). The tutorials then move on to putting together a demo package and selling yourself ('Think Ronan Keating should sing your song? Then say so.') before tips are given about getting a good manager, improving your vocal technique and putting extra polish on your songs. What the makers have done is present a down-to-earth advice shop while making no attempt to disguise the fact that the road to stardom is as long and hard as 10 laps round the M25 on a pushbike.

Popstars: down-to-earth advice on how to get to the top

Meanwhile, established stars such as MJ Cole chat about their early days, spurned auditionee Darius Danesh answers your showbiz queries, and chief judge Nasty Nigel spills the beans on how to impress the industry. But if it's the spectacle of tone-deaf brickies murdering Britney Spears' *Hit Me Baby One More Time* you're after, then the section How Not To Be A Pop Star is all you need.

SONGPLAYER

www.songplayer.com ★★★★

If the only thing stopping you from being a global superstar is musical talent, then you'd better start learning. And with its free online guitar course, Songplayer is a great educational resource that allows budding Carlos Santanas to learn in their own time. It may not hold much appeal for the more experienced axeperson, but for those who don't know one end of a guitar from the other it's invaluable. Once you've mastered the art of the two-chord song, you can graduate on to the Songplayer System, where you can play along to a number of recent hits. Current favourites include Toploader's *Dancing In The Moonlight* and Jamiroquai's *Space Cowboy*. Well, there's no accounting for taste.

MUSICIANS UNION

www.musicians-union.org.uk ★★★★

The Musicians' Union is invaluable for gathering industry contacts, advice and getting in touch with other musicians, and its site is an admirable extension of its work. While articles on such matters as the pitfalls of signing contracts, gigging abroad and the Stolen Instrument Register are worthy features, it's with legal advice and support that the MU excels. Provided you're a member, you can get it to negotiate performance fees, recover owed money and give free contract advice, which – should you ever get into a position to need such guidance – would be as useful as the recording contract itself.

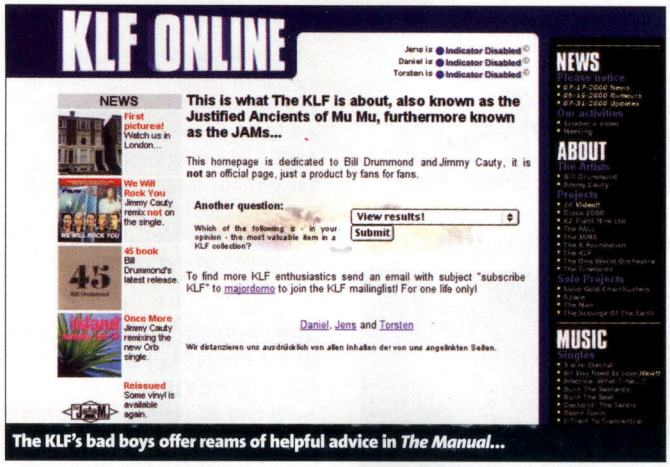
THE MANUAL

www.klf.de/online/books/bytheklf/manual.htm ★★★

The finest book ever written about making it in the music industry is probably *The Manual (How to Have a Number One the Easy Way)*. At the time of original publication, its authors, KLF's Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty, had just had a hit single with *Doctorin' The Tardis*, and were in the ideal position to blow the myth that talent was the secret to a successful music career.

This extensive KLF site features the entire *Manual* in all its glory. Advice ranges from the sensible ('You have to devote all your time to being Number One') to the down-right stupid ('Listen to radio DJ Bruno Brookes'), but it's all essential reading for the burgeoning pop star. Admittedly, the pair went on to dump sheep carcasses outside award ceremonies and burn a million quid on a remote Scottish isle, but back when Drummond and Cauty still had some grip on their

WORDS: SAM UPTON; PICTURES: PA



The KLF's bad boys offer reams of helpful advice in *The Manual*...

sanity, they certainly knew what they were talking about.

THE ACADEMY OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

www.acm.ac.uk ★★★★

'Europe's Leading School for Rock and Pop Musicians' has an online presence as impressive as its list of courses. There's information on degrees and diplomas, a Q&A and news of which star is visiting the school (Brand New Heavies singer Carleen Anderson was the most recent). With an admirable amount of Flash and background information on the courses, the ACM clearly knows exactly what it's doing. If you're determined to climb the ladder to pop success, serious, professional sites such as this could be the ideal starting point.

Peoplesound: MP3s and more

It's essential reading for the burgeoning pop star

PEOPLESOUND

www.peoplesound.com ★★★★

Not only does Peoplesound offer bands and artists the opportunity to reach millions just by posting their MP3s onto the site, it also has information for anyone wanting to chance their arm at becoming a pop star. Whether you need help selling yourself online, raising money for a demo or simply knowing where to be seen, its Artist Survival Guide is nigh-on essential. Also, for those new to the concept of music over the Net, there's a guide to the process and technology behind it. Meanwhile, should you feel in need of some inspiration, there are thousands of free tracks to download covering every genre, from the pop, rock and indie to reggae, New Age and easy listening.

THE STAGE

www.thestage.com ★★★★

Seeing as just about every current pop star from All Saints to Billie Piper learnt their trade at one of the capital's stage schools, you'd do well to keep an eye on the country's oldest showbiz paper for enrolment details, plus advice on breaking into the industry. There's a guide to impressing talent scouts and finding agents, plus, if you're really desperate, rundowns of the best cruise ships and holiday camps for the blossoming performer, all of which are delivered in a nonsense-free style. And seeing as having 'pop star' written as job description in your passport doesn't always impress landlords when they're after their rent, there's also page after page of ads seeking musicians and vocalists for session work.

POPWIRE

www.popwire.com ★★★★

Describing itself as a Pop Star Generator, Popwire is a pan-European venture that aims to seek out new talent and exhibit its wares online. But while there's no shortage of music portals game to showcase anyone with an acoustic guitar and an MP3 player, Popwire has a more discerning eye and tends to maintain a high level of quality control. Recent success stories include Swedish band Grass-Show and Brit-rockers Chalk, both of whom were filmed for the site playing to a packed industry audience at The Monarch in London. And should you impress the powers that be, there's Popwire TV, Popwire radio and the *Popwire* magazine, all designed to raise the profile of their chosen troubadours.

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

BAND SITES

UBL.com
www.ubl.com
Go here first for the huge search engine.
Bigmouth
www.bigmouth.co.uk
UK-specific site with tons of links.
Wall of Sound
wallofsound.go.com/artists
Links and features from the US.

NEWS AND REVIEWS

RollingStone.com
www.rollingstone.com
The US publication features extra online content.
NME.com
www.nme.com
NME's online version has a reputation for breaking news.
Spin
www.spin.com
Online version of the edgy US music mag.

GIGS AND TOURS

Aloud.com
www.aloud.com
Brilliant search engine for gigs.
firstcalltickets.com
www.firstcalltickets.com
Tickets for everything, from gigs to flower shows...
SceneOne
www.sceneone.co.uk
Easy-to-use guide.
Way Ahead
www.wayahead.com
Tickets at great prices.

BUYING CDS

secondsounds.com
www.secondsounds.com
Used CDs, but the prices are unbeatable.
Audiostreet
www.audiostreet.co.uk
With free postage!
Play247
www.play247.com
Cheap chart CDs.
recordstore.co.uk
www.recordstore.co.uk
'*The* home of dance music retail on the Net'.

MP3s

CMJ
www.cmj.com/mp3
MP3 portal, with newsy bits.
MP3.com
www.mp3.com
Heaps of downloads.

POST YOUR BAND'S MP3s

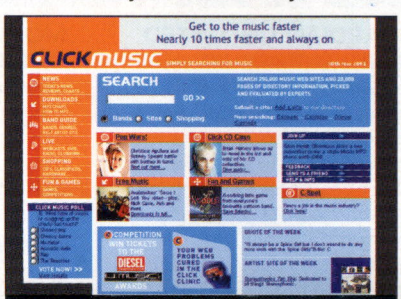
Clickmusic
www.clickmusic.co.uk
Excellent MP3 portal.
get-signed.co.uk
www.get-signed.co.uk
Share ideas and pick up tips.
Vitaminic
www.vitaminic.com
Features a huge range of genres.

NEWSGROUP

alt.music.independent
The place where the up-and-coming mingle.

MAILING LIST

Rate new tunes with others. Send an email marked 'info hits' to ***majordomo@server1.softdisk.com***.



Clickmusic has plenty of MP3s to satisfy

NME.com features everyone from Missy Elliott to Mel C to the Manics

NEED MORE? **Latest music sites** What's New p19 **Useful music addresses** The Directory p78

FOCUS:// Reviews

Hit, miss or maybe

Unsure whether to watch that movie? Ask the Web watchers if it's worth it...

Unimpressed by the plot development, the audience was turning ugly

GUARDIAN UNLIMITED FILM

film.guardian.co.uk ★★★★★

Serious film fans need look no further than *The Guardian*'s site. Choose from the week's new releases, or use the search option to find a movie that's come and gone. Typing in 'Traffic' brought up Justin Kerrigan's 1999 clubber flick *Human Traffic*, George Loan Tucker's 1913 *Traffic in Souls*, and this year's Soderbergh drama.

Soderbergh's *Traffic* gets the full monty: snappy synopsis, links to related features, ratings from everyone from *The Sun* to Stella Artois, and lengthy reviews from both *The Guardian* and *The Observer*'s film writers. And by lengthy we're talking a good 1,000 words or so, chock full of the sort of critical energy only a passionate film buff could muster.

Other oldies, such as *Gone with the Wind*, don't receive the full review treatment, but you can read users' reviews or follow a link to the IMDb (see panel, right). There's also a small synopsis, user rating, year and running time particulars, plus a small cast list.

MOVIE REVIEW QUERY ENGINE

www.mrqe.com ★★★★★

This impressive database boasts over 185,000 reviews covering more than 25,000 titles. Users can either type in the name of the film they're looking for or use the scroll bar to search through specific categories. We liked the 'Most Popular Titles (past 3 hours)' and the 'American Film Institute's 100 Greatest American Movies'. At the time of writing, the Oscars had just come to a close and all the films in the former list were Oscar nominees and/or winners. Search results are formatted similarly to IMDb's, with an even longer list of reviews (153) awaiting you for films such as *Traffic*. Older, more obscure and foreign films are also catered for; a search for Léos Carax's 1991 *Les amants du Pont-Neuf* proved as much, with 30 reviews available to peruse.

REELVIEWS: JAMES BERARDINELLI'S MOVIE REVIEWS

movie-reviews.colossus.net ★★★★

He may have an official-sounding name, but James is just an ordinary film buff who has posted a vast quantity of reviews online. 'Personally, I don't believe anyone needs a "formal" film-criticism education to review films,' he says, 'film criticism is not surgery.' To that effect, Berardinelli's reviews should suit anyone who's looking for a straightforward review: something that simply says whether a film is good or bad, and why.

The review database is easy enough to get around and dates back to around 1994. Use the alphabetical 'fast archive' to find a review in a dash. Film reviews include release dates, MPAA classifications, cast and crew lists, and star ratings.

ROTTEN TOMATOES

www.rottentomatoes.com

★★★★★

If reading only one critic's opinion offends your sense of democracy, then log onto Rotten Tomatoes, where creator Senh Duong has compiled reviews from different writers (for *Traffic*, there's 92 to choose from). If the sentence-long snippet isn't enough to make up your mind, click to be redirected to the review in its entirety. It's easy,

@ If you have to bookmark one...

THE INTERNET MOVIE DATABASE (IMDB)

uk.imdb.com ★★★★★

We could go on about the IMDb for ages; luckily, though, we're only concentrating on one aspect – the reviews. For purposes of judging sites against one another, *the net* chose Steven Soderbergh's Oscar-winning *Traffic* as its general film-search query. Typing it in and hitting 'Return' brought up over 100 critiques, in various languages and by both professional and amateur writers. Surprisingly, you'll even find up to half that amount for an older film like *Gone with the Wind*.

On the downside, an impatient surfer could be overwhelmed by the number of write-ups available: should you go for the Apollo Movie Guide, Movie Geek Central or Salon.com? In cases of major desperation ('Who cares how the sepia tints affect the general mood of the film; I just want to know if I should take my date to see it!'), you could always opt for the quick Leonard Maltin summary. You'll find it along the left-hand column, under plots and quotes. Only a paragraph or so long, Lenny even includes a star rating, just in case you can't be bothered to read at all.

IMDb: more reviews than you can shake a stick at

The IMDb's strongest point, meanwhile, is its fast results. Everything you could be looking for is in an easy click-and-find format. And, of course, if you're searching for something other than reviews, you needn't look any further than this massive database. Want to know how much money *Traffic* pulled in in its opening weekend or who designed the sets? The IMDb has got it all...and then some.

WORDS: JENNIFER KEARNS; PICTURES: KOBAL, NEWSMAKERS, ONLINE USA

Rotten Tomatoes: fresh and fruity

fun and, with the colourful 'fresh' and 'rotten' markers added to every review, you know what each critic thought of it in a flash.

The site has garnered praise from the likes of *The New Yorker* and *USA Today*, and is being revamped to bring even more film knowledge to the masses. Oh, and our little *L'Humanité* just-how-good-is-that-search-engine-anyway? test came up with 12 reviews, with a tomatometer rating of 67 percent fresh. Impressive.

AIN'T IT COOL NEWS

www.aint-it-cool-news.com ★★★★

AICN 's database may not be the most extensive, but who cares when the available write-ups are this much fun to read? Set up like Berardinelli's archive above, just click on the letter and hope the film you're looking for is listed; if it is, you're in for a treat.

The *Traffic* review was based on the test screening and offers sound advice to director Soderbergh, as well as giving future audiences an idea of what to expect. Strong portraits of actors Benicio Del Toro (who has since won an Oscar for his performance) and Erika Christensen add a 'you have to see this!' enthusiasm without sounding amateurish.

EMPIRE ONLINE

www.empireonline.co.uk ★★★

The online home of Britain's best-selling movie magazine tries hard to live up to expectations, with news, reviews and features galore. Currently, Empire Online claims to have over 6,000 reviews, including 'every new film release from the last four years'. Unfortunately, when we put it to the test by typing in French drama *L'Humanité* (1999), we came up empty-handed. If IMDb and even Roger Ebert could find the time to review this Cannes-winning drama, why couldn't Empire?

Which is where our problem with this site arises; users can only type in the film name, rather than clicking on a letter for a more in-depth search. And, sure enough, when we searched for Bruno Dumont, *L'Humanité*'s director, we found our film. But should users be expected to know directors' names? »

LINKS ;-) MEMORABILIA

Remember my name

Face it: the vast majority of us will never be famous. For most of us, the nearest we'll get to being on telly is waving maniacally in the background as some poor news reporter speaks on the street, and the nearest we'll get to a celebrity is screaming at them when they arrive for a movie premiere (you'd think that by the age of 35 we'd have grown out of this).

Perhaps that's why so many people love memorabilia: because they are reminders of that elusive fame. If you're the sort of person who loves to eat at Planet Hollywood just so you can slurp soup under the actual animatronic model from *Jaws*, you'll love some of the riches the Internet has to offer – whether you're browsing or buying. Take the Prop Store (***www.propstore.co.uk***). When we visited you could buy a Barbarian shield complete with real fake blood, as seen in the opening scene of *Gladiator*. It'd set you back $645 (just over four hundred quid), but then it was just after the Oscars and these things don't come cheap. Well, not as cheap as a miniature *Chicken Run* hay bale, which was 'just' £60.

A miniature *Chicken Run* hay bale was 'just' £60

It's not an inexpensive hobby, getting your hands on the things the stars have had their hands on. MovieProp (***www.movieprop.com***) offers a police badge from yer actual *Robocop 3* – a film largely ignored upon its release and which has certainly garnered no more fame or respect since – at $75. If that's too much, move downmarket to autographed photographs. Scribbles on snaps can be slightly cheaper, and there's certainly a thriving online marketplace for them, although they still get a bit steep at the top end: Cinemania (***www.clubi.ie/cinemania***) offers Bond girl Ursula Andress in That Swimsuit (itself recently sold for thousands) for £45, while a vintage Marlene Dietrich photograph will set you back twice that amount. Hunt around: for $50 at Baby Jane (***www.babyjaneofhollywood.com***) we found a signed snap of *Sex and the City*'s Sarah Jessica Parker in a Marilyn Monroe-style billowing-skirt pose. Whatever lights your candle.

The wise surfer will avoid Planet Hollywood's own Web site (***www.planethollywood.com***), which rarely strays from mass-produced mug/poster/T-shirt territory. But that has its own star-power cachet: can you imagine being so important that manufacturers would produce commemorative plates featuring your face? That's the power of memorabilia: as all the top film stars, pop stars and football teams have discovered to their bank managers' eternal gratitude, people will buy anything if it's got the right name plastered on it. And, again, they're buying it all on the Internet.

The Cinema Store (***www.the-cinema-store.com***) offers a huge variety of card, book and poster movie merchandise. Bartertown (***www.bartertown.org.uk***) flogs everything from *Aladdin* action figures to *X-Men* memorabilia. If music's your passion, you can't go wrong with Rockmine (***www.rockmine.music.co.uk***), whether you want use your wallet to remember Bryan Adams' 1985 Tour (programmes for £8) or the 1969 Isle of Wight Festival ('mega-rare package' £500).

It would be foolish to claim that the Internet created the merchandising market, but it has certainly fanned the flames. Two of the driving forces behind the expansion of the Net have been mindless chatter and rampant commercialism; meaning fans talk themselves into a frenzy about Britney Spears lava lamps then go to ***www.britneyspears.com*** to buy them (at $40 a pop). So you may not be able to buy the sheets that Britney sleeps on – not legally, anyway – but you can get her face on your pillow for $29.95 plus shipping.

Elvis has left the jacket

FOCUS:// Cinema listings guides <cont>

POPCORN.CO.UK

www.popcorn.co.uk ★★★★★

With new and upcoming releases, DVD and video reviews, plus a general search facility, users shouldn't have to work too hard to find their chosen movie review at Popcorn.

Impressively, even *Gone with the Wind* gets a full write-up here, as well as a picture gallery (although it only contains one snap). We also like the option to email a review to a friend. We found the same for *L'Humanité* (with two images). And *Traffic*? Well that gets the whole shebang: pictures, reviews, news articles and a trailer. Popcorn is synonymous with film, and rightfully so.

Even *Gone With The Wind* gets a full write-up

TOTAL FILM NETWORK

www.totalfilm.co.uk ★★★★

Total Film has worked hard to make its review section easy to use, dividing it between new films, upcoming releases, DVDs and videos. Like Empire Online, there is no option to choose from an alphabetical list, but the search does seem more responsive. When we typed in *L'Humanité*, we found what we were looking for. And, yes, we did use the same spelling.

As for the reviews, the critics seem to know their stuff. The writing is detailed without being verbose, knowing rather than know-it-all. And we liked the 'related articles' on the left-hand side of the review, which led us to features on *Traffic*'s actors and Soderbergh's other works.

ROGER EBERT

www.suntimes.com/ebert/index.html ★★★

Chicago Sun/Times critic Roger Ebert has been in the biz for some time and his site features reviews dating back to 1985. You can search for films by year, star rating, title, director or actors. There's also a 'the great movies' section with films like *On the Waterfront* and *Apocalypse Now*.

Roger Ebert's writing style is very particular, and takes some getting used to. It's always subjective and tends to be interjected with superfluous remarks or recollections.

VIRGIN.NET

www.virgin.net/movies ★★★★

Virgin's movie database focuses more on recent releases than classics. Something like *Gone with the Wind* receives only a small, albeit critical analysis ('Much-loved, totally un-PC blockbuster') with the added bonus of a link to the IMDb. *Traffic*, meanwhile, gets more of a look-in.

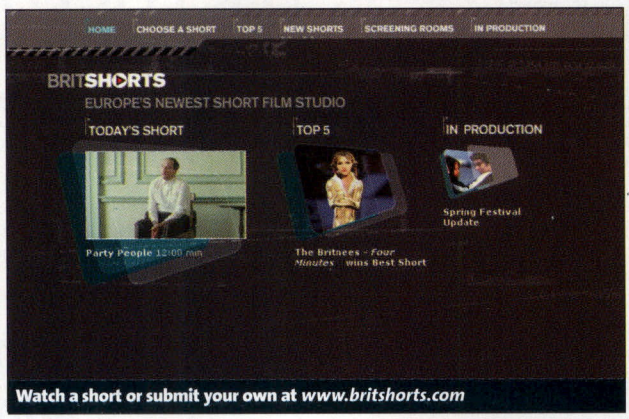
The writing is strong and gives a clear plot summary, while pointing out why (or why not) it's worth seeing. User reviews at the bottom of the main piece give you an idea of what the masses think.

The problem Virgin.net shares with some of the sites listed above is the search facility itself. You have to take your chances typing in the name of the film rather than using any type of easy-use alphabetical listing.

Popcorn: doesn't require too much work to find a particular film

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials



Watch a short or submit your own at *www.britshorts.com*

MOVIE NEWS AND RELEASE DATES

Cinescape Online
www.cinescape.com
Features links to different fan sites, as well as the latest news.

Dark Horizons
www.darkhorizons.com
Includes trailers, reviews and release dates. There's also a section for 'rumours 'n' scoops'.

Hollywood.com
www.hollywood.com
The latest gossip from the star-lined streets.

Mr Showbiz: Movie Index
mrshowbiz.go.com/reviews/moviereviews/index.html
Find out what's playing and what's coming up at this site with a discerning edge.

OFFICIAL FILM SITE RESOURCES

Disney Movies
www.disney.co.uk/DisneyMovies
All the kids' faves in one big, colourful site.

DreamWorks SKG
www.dreamworks.com
Spielberg et al's site has plenty of trailers to download.

Fox Movies
www.foxmovies.com
Provides links to all 20th Century Fox movie releases.

Miramax Cafe
www.miramax.com
Links to all of Miramax's releases, plus general movie news.

Paramount Pictures
www.paramount.com
The online home of the big rocky mountain. Includes games, chat and features.

Warner Bros Online
www.movies.warnerbros.com
Site featuring WB's new films and lost classics.

DreamWorks SKG: tons of trailers

AMATEUR AND SHORT FILM WEB SITES

AtomFilms
www.atomfilms.com
Offers new filmmakers a chance to sell their wares.

Britshorts
www.britshorts.com
Europe's newest short-film studio produces and showcases the best of existing shorts.

in-movies
www.in-movies.com
Budding filmmakers may submit scripts here.

SightSound.com
www.sightsound.com
The place to see *The Quantum Project* – the first full-length, full-budgeted Net film.

NEWSGROUP

Misc. film
rec.arts.movies.current-films
Discuss the latest cinematic releases with other film buffs.

MAILING LIST

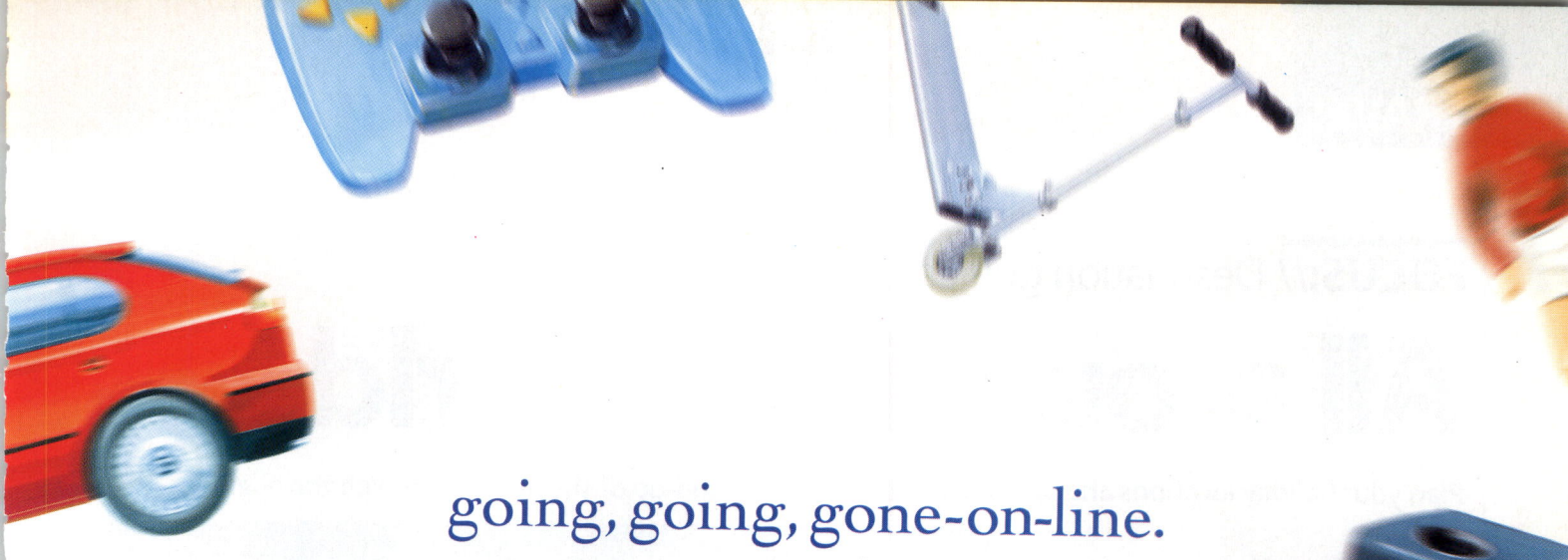
Join a discussion group which focuses on the latest films, hottest directors and actors. Send an email marked 'info movies' to ***majordomo@leben.com***.

CHAT ROOM

Movie Board is 'dedicated to the movies'. Join the natter at ***www.jtj.net/jtj/MOVIE/wwwboard.shtml***.

NEED MORE?

This month's movie sites What's New p18
Useful media addresses The Directory p78



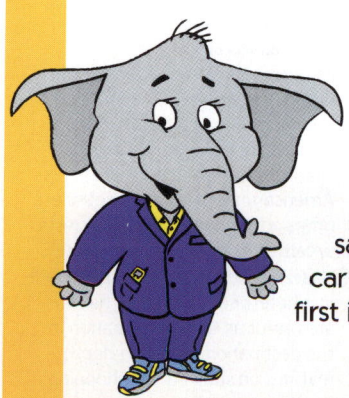
going, going, gone-on-line.

Digital Cameras
PDA's
MP3 Players
DVD's
Mobile Internet
Mini Discs

You can buy and sell anything on eBay.

ebay™.CO.UK

even
cheaper car
insurance



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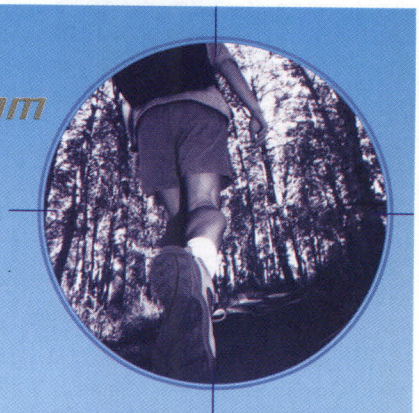
www.elephant.co.uk

9feet.com

Columbia Sportswear Company
HELLY HANSEN
karrimor
Lowe alpine
berghaus
THE NORTH FACE

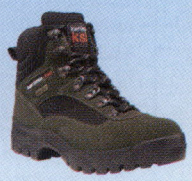


We've been there,
we know what it takes

Choose the right gear for the right situation. Our experts can guide you to the right clothing and equipment decisions and help you choose from over 5,000 top branded products

Lowe Alpine
Walkabout 37
Code: LA256
A comfortable lightweight classic.
£50.00

Berghaus
Pac-Lite Jacket
Code: BH001
Ultimate mountain style and performance.
£200.00



Karrimor
KSB 300 GTX
Code: KA097
Tough waterproof support.
£100.00

the on-line adventure store www.9feet.com Tel: 0845 6011 758

FOCUS:// Destination guides

All around the world

Plan your holiday locations and agenda online with our round-up of the best of the Web travel guides

Musical Youth's comeback tour was not going to plan

BRITISH TOURIST AUTHORITY

www.visitbritain.com/uk/home2.htm

★★★★

Although it's not really a foreign travel guide, this British Tourist Authority site provides a very handy guide to our own back yard. If you've decided to forgo the pleasures of foreign fields for your hols this year and aim to explore this sceptred isle, log on to see what's happening in cities and towns around the country. Whether you fancy a couple of weeks away or can only bear to deal with the hordes of foreign tourists one day at a time, this site has plenty of ideas for what to see and do. Use the events database to plan your trip around a particular event (plenty of Easter eggstravaganzas scheduled when we visited), or look up the various attractions across the country, such as historic houses and gardens. If cities are more your scene, detailed info on all the major urban areas in the UK is contained here. Never knew there was so much going on in our little land...

@ If you have to bookmark one...

LONELY PLANET ONLINE

www.lonelyplanet.com ★★★★★

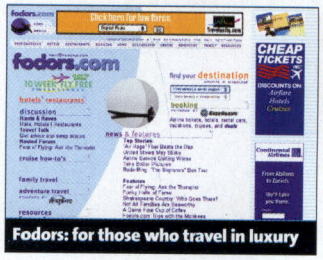
Online, as it is in the printed world, the *Lonely Planet* series of guidebooks are still the best at telling you what to expect in the big, bad world once you venture past your front doorstep. Divided into reassuringly easy-to-manage bites, the globe becomes a place to explore and enjoy rather than hide from and be scared of. Detailed information on many of the world's major cities is available online; open the map of the world and click on the desired region to get the lowdown on your destination. All the essential need-to-knows are here, such as the best times to go, what you can expect to pay for basics, ease of getting around and, of course, all the main attractions. Alternately, if you don't have any idea whatsoever where to go for your two-week break, this site provides some interesting possibilities for you to mull over, and there's also a news service (updated daily) covering the latest developments in the world. And if you like the tips so much you want to buy the book, you can do so online here. Lonely Planet Online gives you the world at your fingertips in a quick and painless way.

Lonely Planet: the world at your fingertips

FODORS.COM

www.fodors.com ★★★

Another well-known name in the world of travel guides ventures online, with mixed results. Aimed more at the luxury end traveller than the mass-market tourist, this American-based guide nonetheless offers advice relevant to all tourists, whether they arrive first or cattle class. Tips on how to get a good rate in a hotel or discount on a hire car are useful, as is the information in the destination guides. In-depth features on subjects like shopping in Milan are well researched, although a piece on jet lag contains nothing you won't already know. The Rants & Raves section makes quite fun reading, relying as it does on fellow travellers spilling the



Fodors: for those who travel in luxury

beans on restaurants and hotels in various cities, although be warned: if your budget is more McDonald's than Mezzo, the recommendations won't be that useful.

ARTHUR FROMMER'S BUDGET TRAVEL ONLINE

www.frommers.com ★★★★

Don't let the word 'budget' put you off: here, it doesn't mean grotty lodgings and surviving on bread and water. Rather, the site lists places that are economical to visit and names hotels and restaurants that offer good value. Nor should the fact that this site's American put you off; the hints and tips on travelling cheaply apply universally. The site is, unsurprisingly, particularly strong on US travel, with informative guides to the country's major (and some not so major) cities. Travellers using this online resource can hope that the advice on different parts of the world is as useful as the guide to London, which we found to be informative, accurate and full of insider knowledge. Actually, if you're planning a trip to London, this guide would not go amiss.

LOCALS IN THE KNOW

www.localsintheknow.com ★★★

The reasoning behind this site is that locals are the best equipped to recommend what to see and do in their areas. Click on the country and city you're visiting to see a selection of entries from those natives who have gone to the bother of writing about their home town. Judging by the London section, entries are current and detailed, and you can read a profile of the sender (age, interests) to gauge how relevant their info might be for you. Details are slightly sparse in areas,with some countries having no entries at all, but this site is a nice idea and complements standard travel guides. And if you're particularly proud of your town, you're free to make your feelings known.

IEXPLORE

www.iexplore.com/index.jhtml
★★★★★

If you consider yourself a traveller rather than a tourist, this well-written and knowledgeable site is the one for you, particularly if you're planning a holiday off the »

WORDS: CLAIRE MCHATTIE; PICTURES: KOBAL; ILLUSTRATION: DAVID SEMPLE

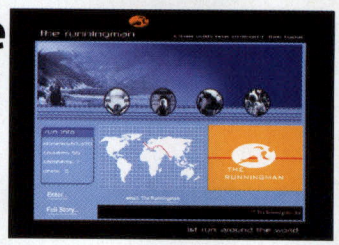
LINKS ;-) JOGGING AROUND THE WORLD

Runner puts foot in mouth

Robert Garside has been called both brave and stupid. In truth, he's probably both. Back in December 1996, the ex-Met policeman left his cosy London life behind him to set off on a bold attempt to run the world. He would, he claimed, cover 43,000 miles at a jog, visiting every continent en route – and then nip over to Antarctica and become the first person to cross it, too.

The 34-year-old has since averaged between 30 and 40 miles each day, picking up food and accommodation along the way from well-wishers and stopping only for the odd rest day. He arrived in New York in March with 30,000 miles under his belt, having been shot at in Russia, stoned in India and imprisoned for five days in China.

The message boards were abuzz with criticism



Garside – who will only answer to the name 'Runningman' – has had the pleasure of seeing his exploits covered in newspapers and on TV stations worldwide. He's aiming for an entry in the *Guinness Book Of Records* and hopes to write a book of his exploits. 'I love running,' he explained. 'And I wanted to explore the world. The thirst for knowledge is within us all and to me it goes in hand in hand with adventure, which is exactly what this is.'

Obviously, the real life Forrest Gump wanted as much exposure as possible to make his exertions worthwhile. And so, as with so many before him, he decided the best way to make himself known to the world was to start a Web site. And that's where the problems started.

Garside's site (***www.runningman.org***) was an admirable and extremely competent piece of interactivity. Every day he videoed his progress and posted the files online, together with an ongoing journal, and encouraged emails and chats with followers from around the globe. Unfortunately, among those scrutinising the site were a number of keen amateur long-distance runners, who began to spot some serious flaws in Garside's story.

Soon, the Runningman's message boards were abuzz with criticism – users claimed they had spotted him in London when he should have been in the Middle East. Yet the site contained detailed and colourful accounts of his encounters with Pakistani muggers and Afghan guerrillas. As the media began to ask difficult questions, Garside was forced to admit that the stories were fictitious – he had jetted back to the UK to visit a bereaved girlfriend.

Others poured scorn on the 'rainforest' leg of his trip, claiming he was actually sunning himself in Rio with Ronnie Biggs at the time, a claim which has never been substantiated. And then there were the professional knockers, who pointed to the lack of detailed times and places on the site as evidence of some convenient 'mis-calculations'. One Canadian runner, David Blaikie, has gone so far as to give over a significant portion of his site (Fox.NSTN.Ca/~dblaikie) to attacking Garside, an ongoing feud which has spilled over into vitriolic online articles, furious message board postings and transcripts of expletive-filled phone calls. Garside says that his online detractors have 'partly spoiled' the whole exercise.

The adventurer himself, however, plans to answer them in pretty spectacular fashion. At a point yet to be decided, he will embark on a New York odyssey, covered by TV and relayed on his Web site, in a bid to establish beyond all doubt his endurance and athleticism. This involves running up the Empire State Building, completing two non-stop 24-hour stints on a treadmill and arriving fresh in Times Square to present himself to the media. All this fuss over a Web site...

Runningman: can't put a foot right

The Creative D.A.P Jukebox stores 4 days of hi-fi quality music using MP3 and other future formats. You can enjoy listening to 150 albums, that's 1500 tracks of EAX enhanced audio, wherever you go. Find out more about our latest Personal Digital Entertainment products at WWW.CREATIVEJUKEBOX.COM

CREATIVE®

PERSONAL DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT
Starts Here.

All Your Music. Wherever You Go.

FOCUS:// Destination guides <cont>

beaten track. When we visited, there were reports on the Galapagos Islands, Machu Picchu and the Okavango Delta to name a few, as well as in-depth features on Africa and Spain (with not a crowded Costa del Sol beach to be seen). The site also lists *National Geographic Adventure* magazine's hot new itineraries, ranging at the time from skiing near the North Pole on the Siberian coast to cycling through Mongolia. Eco travel is heavily promoted, with consideration for the planet and other cultures paramount. Even if you won't go further than Bognor Regis, this site's great for fantasy trips.

ROUGH GUIDES

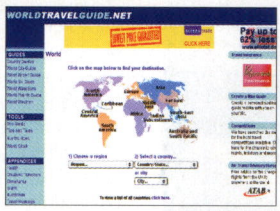
www.roughguides.co.uk ★★★★

This site may not win any design awards but with the sheer volume of information contained here, who cares? As you'd expect from one of the leading lights in the world of travel guides, the site is well researched and authoritative, with comprehensive guides to pretty much anywhere you could want to go. You can also share your travel thoughts at Travel Talk, purchase any of the *Rough Guide* print titles and arrange travel insurance. Women can pick up tips on solo travelling by reading the anthology of female writing. But perhaps most impressive of all is the 'complete index' which lists every destination covered online. So whether you want info on Aachen in Germany to Zunyi in China, this will give all the details you need.

BEACHTOWEL

www.beachtowel.co.uk ★★★

For bite-sized chunks of destination info, Beachtowel hits the spot. Primarily a holiday booking site, it also contains overviews of all the main world destinations. Don't expect information on individual cities, but for a rough idea of what a country's about, such as best times to go, weather, etc, it's a handy enough site. High points are the excellent currency converter – which seems to cover every country – and global weather forecasts.

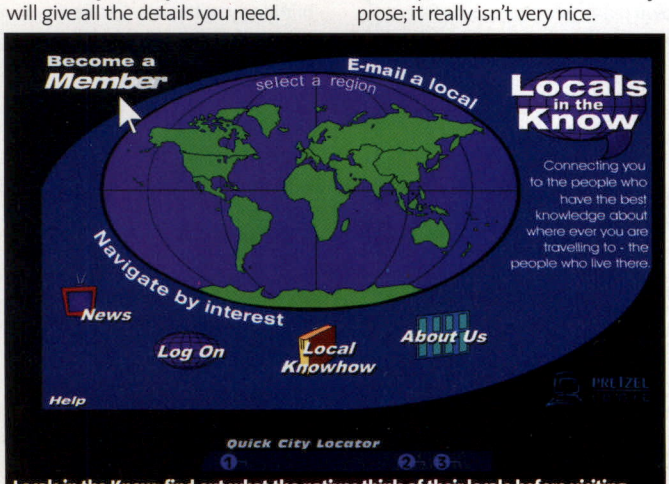


You can create your own guides to take on your hols

WORLD TRAVEL GUIDE

www.wtg-online.com ★★★★★

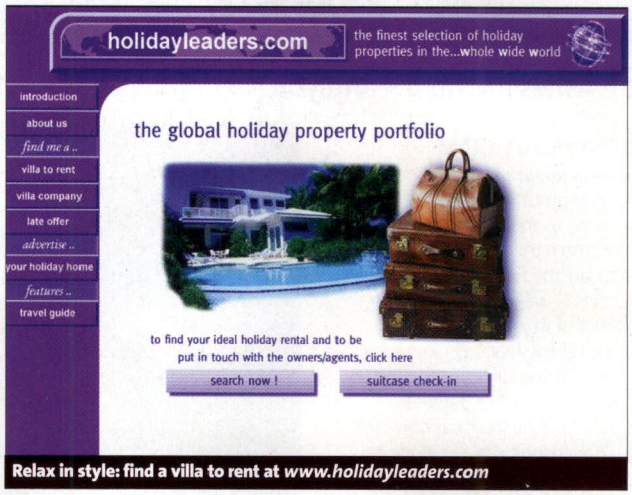
This succinct, slick site is quick and easy to use, and a mine of useful information. Click on the country you're planning to visit, then select a city. A profile appears, giving a general overview of the place, and you can then choose from a variety of topics to explore, from contact addresses and finding accommodation, to history and government details. But it doesn't end at good resort reports: you can create your own mini guides to take on your hols, look up the weather worldwide (always a popular feature with us Brits) and also check the global clock (at the time of writing it's 8.44am in Tegucigalpa, if you're interested). Feel inspired to write about your travels? Click on the tips and tales section to share your thoughts, but try not to let yourself be influenced by some of the stories posted and resort to flowery prose; it really isn't very nice.



Locals in the Know: find out what the natives think of their locale before visiting

@CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials



Relax in style: find a villa to rent at *www.holidayleaders.com*

TOP ONLINE FLIGHT DEALS

A2bTravel.com
www.a2btravel.com
'Britain's biggest online travel information and booking resource' has flights leaving from across the UK and Ireland.

Avro
www.avro.co.uk
Newly-launched Web site, featuring low-cost, flexible flights to the Mediterranean.

Cheap Flights.com
www.cheapflights.com
Where thrifty surfers go for flights; they also do package holidays and late deals.

Deckchair UK
www.deckchair.com
Comprehensive flight-finder.

MyOwnPrice.com
www.myownprice.com
This site asks how much you're prepared to pay and then tries to match it. Very useful.

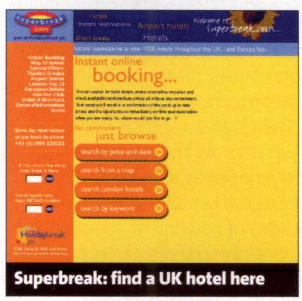
DOS AND DON'TS

Tips 4 Trips
www.tips4trips.com
1,000 handy 'tips for trips'.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office – Travel Advice
www.fco.gov.uk/travel
Get info on countries before setting off.

The Travel News Organisation
www.travel-news.org
Independent news for travellers. If you fancy taking a course in poetry while on holiday, you can find out how to do so here.

eTravel.org
www.etravel.org
A travel magazine, with plenty of tips for the traveller.



Superbreak: find a UK hotel here

ACCOMMODATION

Places To Stay
www.placestostay.com
This site will find you a suitable place to rest up.

CottageNet UK
www.cottage-net.ndirect.co.uk
Self-catering database for the UK and Ireland.

Smooth Hound Systems
www.smoothhound.co.uk
Cheap UK B&Bs and hotels.

Holidayleaders.com
www.holidayleaders.com
A global directory of villas to rent.

Superbreak.com
www.superbreak.com
Features over 1800 hotels across the UK.

NEWSGROUP

alt.travel.marketplace
See if there's a cheap break on offer that suits you here.

MAILING LIST

Discuss travel ideas with others. Send an email marked 'info TRAVEL-L' to ***listserv@vm3090.ege.edu.tr***.

CHAT ROOM

Find someone to travel with at ***www.passportwilltravel.com***.

NEED MORE? **Useful travel addresses** The Directory p78

FOCUS:// Cricket

Ash Test dummies

The Ashes are here – and you can follow all the action and news on the Web

334NOTOUT.COM

www.334notout.com ★★★★

The '334notout' in question refers, of course, to the highest of three huge scores that the late Sir Donald Bradman, the finest batsman that cricket has ever seen, inflicted on England in 1930 as the Aussies claimed the Ashes.

This site specialises in the history of the Ashes clashes between England and Australia, and will tell you the reasons why everyone is getting so excited about this summer's series in England. Additionally, it will keep you up to date on the latest news from the camps of both protagonists, making this an ideal desktop companion to the series.

There's also a section dedicated to what's now known as the 'Bodyline Series' in 1932/33, where the English captain came up with the idea of bowling at opponents rather than to them. So this summer, when that nasty Glenn McGrath is peppering our brave lads with bouncers, just remember we started it...

CLICKCRICKET.COM

www.clickcricket.com ★★★★

If you want a taste of how popular cricket is in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and all points in between, then you'll appreciate clickcricket.com's efforts to clear the boundary. The main strength of the site lies in its columnists, who include India skipper Sourav Ganguly and Sri Lankan spinner Muttiah Muralidaran.

England: gunning for the Ashes

Recent additions to the site include downloads for some funky cricket calendar desktop wallpaper that updates itself each month, or screensavers for those who are far more dedicated to cricket than to their employers.

Clickcricket is one of the few sites not to be aimed exclusively at the armchair fan. The site provides extensive sections on fitness and coaching tips, so getting wired doesn't have to mean gaining weight at the same time.

CRICKETNEXT.COM

www.cricketnext.com ★★★★

Another site being beamed from the Indian subcontinent, CricketNext.com takes its cricket coverage very, very seriously. One headline that stood out when we looked at the site was 'An open letter to Sourav Ganguly: You gave undue importance to the over-rated Ian Chappell'. You've just got to read on, and that's the secret of this site: readable views on the game. Like Clickcricket, CricketNext.com has some big-name columnists and covers the major tours around the world, and it's crammed with the sort of intelligent, thoughtful writing that fans of any game love to read. Not that it's all deathly prose: there is fun to be had with a nice selection of games, wallpaper and screensavers, a hefty selection of video clips, plus the chance to become the fan of the week.

MAGICCRICKET

www.cybercricket.com ★★★★

Although lacking the well-known columnists of other sites, Magic-Cricket holds its own in the news stakes by keeping a watchful eye on worldwide stories. And as is often the case with sites that don't have the big names with which to draw in the punters, MagicCricket takes the lead in fun ways to bring scores to your desktop.

MagicCricket: fun on your desktop

When a match is on, the site enables you to download one of two Java programs. The first is a discreet ticker box that motors away merrily on your desktop, bringing you the latest scores in a fashion that won't catch the attention of any passing bosses if you're (supposed to be) at work. The second, more fun, program produces a virtual cricket stadium with all the action. Who said cricket wasn't fun anyway?

CRICMANIA

www.cricmania.com ★★★★

CricMania may not have all of the nice extras and touches of some of the other sites, but it does have a huge amount of information and reports. But the site's real strength is that it allows the busy surfer to find what they're looking for faster than Graham Thorpe can sneak a quick single.

@ If you have to bookmark one...

CRICINFO

www-uk.cricket.org ★★★★★

As *the net* Awards prove, if there's one cricket site that's guaranteed to bowl you over, then it's got to be CricInfo. Quantity is not necessarily a pointer to quality, but this site gets the umpire's decision on both counts.

The URL included here is for the UK gateway, but CricInfo also offers different front pages for all the Test-playing nations and a few more besides. As well as tailoring information for users, this also has a practical application with a choice of seven servers (even one in the USA, for some unknown reason) to aid your surfing. This is handy to know in case your local server gets a bit chocker during a big match, because you can cheat by following the action through a different gateway.

CricInfo: everything you'll ever need for cricketing bliss

The reason for the huge volume of traffic is primarily the site's ball-by-ball text report, which you can keep as a handy window on your desktop to keep you updated while you work. It's almost as good as watching – not to mention easier to follow – and depending on who's typing away furiously, it can also have moments of genuine wit.

A massive database of records, statistics, profiles and news is backed up by a WAP service and daily sound files in RealPlayer format. A truly essential site for anyone even remotely interested in cricket.

WORDS: BRUCE POPE ; PICTURES: PA

CricMania: find what you want fast

Either through drop-down menus at the top of the homepage or in chunks of text clearly laid out at the bottom, all the reports, news, scorecards and player information are at your fingertips through a quick and easy interface.

There's a good choice of ratings systems (and there are a few to choose from, with no unifying way of rating players ever having been decided), links through to other sites dealing specifically with cricket rules, plus some jokes and games to lighten your mood.

WISDEN.COM

www.wisden.com ★★★

Even those who don't like cricket have heard of Wisden. In the non-cyber world, it has long been established as the authority on cricket; it can lay claim to the title 'the Bible of the game' more than any other book on any other sport with its heady mix of stats and hard facts. But that voice is only just reaching the Internet, and offline authority counts for little if surfers are disappointed by what they find when they dial up.

Luckily for Wisden, the current site – which bears more than a passing resemblance to the Guardian Unlimited sites – is only temporary and is going to relaunch in time to coincide with the Australia squad's arrival in the UK for this summer's Ashes series.

There's some good solid news and useful information already up, but if Wisden can transfer its full potential to the Internet (we're preparing to be dazzled by the database), then it should be quite a site. One to keep a watching brief on...

CRICKET DIRECT

www.cricketdirect.co.uk ★★★

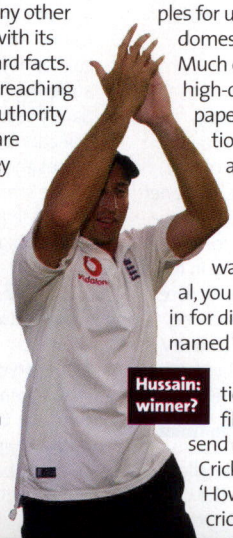
If watching the Ashes inspires you to pick up a bat and pad up, visit Cricket Direct, an online store selling a huge range of cricket gear. If we were just marking on choice and price, which can't be faulted, then the site would probably merit a higher mark, but you can't complete a transaction without resorting to the phone or postal service.

You can browse, choose and send in your order form, but the London-based site doesn't offer an option to pay for your gear online. We can't vouch for delivery times either, as the gear we already have is lasting for ages. We're never usually at the crease long enough to wear it out...

THE PAVILION

www.thepavilion.com.au ★★★★

Despite its splendid cream-tea-and-cucumber-sarnies name, The Pavilion is an Australian cricket site – and it's one of the better examples for up-to-date news, both domestic and international. Much of the reporting is high-quality stuff from newspapers, with links to publications in India, Pakistan and the West Indies.



You can have updates sent to your email inbox or, if you want to get more personal, you can send your views in for discussion in a section named 'The Enemy Camp'.

There's a good selection of audio and video files available, or you can send one of their amusing Cricketgrams of 'Catch', 'Howzat' or 'Duck' to a cricket-loving friend.

The Pavilion: send e-cards to celebrate or commiserate with friends

@CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

Visit Britain's best football magazine online, at *www.fourfourtwo.com*

LATEST NEWS AND SCORES

ESPN.com
espn.go.com
Scores for all sports, with a distinctly American bias.

Sky Sports
www.skysports.com
Forget begrudging the TV subscription fee – this is hot sports news from Sky that comes free of charge.

Soccernet
www.soccernet.com
Score flashes from all UK games (part of the ESPN network).

Sporting Life
www.sporting-life.com
News, scores and betting advice on everything from football to the NFL.

TOP FOOTBALL SITES

Football365.com
www.football365.com
Humour, news and plenty of features.

FourFourTwo
www.fourfourtwo.com
The online home of Britain's best football magazine.

Nationwide UK football
www.nationwide.co.uk/football
Up-to-the-minute news, as well as individual team pages.

Teamtalk
www.teamtalk.com
Independent club news service.

soccer-links.com
www.soccer-links.com
Links for world sites.

ONLINE BETTING SITES

Blue Square
www.bluesq.com
Best-known online bookie.

Sporting Index
www.sportingindex.com
The biggest spread-betting site.

Nationwide UK: football news

Victor Chandler
www.victorchandler.com
User-friendly site from the traditional bookie.

FOLLOW EVENTS LIVE

PlanetFootball.com
www.planetfootball.com
Hub site for English football clubs' audio broadcasts.

Sport On Air
www.sportonair.com
Up-to-date streamed broadcasts, covering football to cricket.

talkSPORT
www.talksport.net
Listen to the radio station's sports coverage as it happens.

SITES FOR INDIVIDUAL SPORTS

planet-rugby.com
www.planet-rugby.com
Where the oval ball rules – hot news from around the globe.

Snooker Net
www.snookernet.com
'The Internet's Biggest and Best Independent Snooker Site'.

FIND A NEWSGROUP

rec.sport.cricket
Share your love for the sport here.

FIND A MAILING LIST

Meet cricket fans from all over. Send an email marked 'info cricket' to ***majordomo@elists.com.ua***.

NEED MORE? Useful sports addresses The Directory p78

FOCUS:// Babies' Health

Happy and healthy

Worried about Junior's sniffles? Soothe your sprog and yourself with these sites about baby health

BABYWORLD

www.babyworld.co.uk ★★★★★

Surprisingly, this appears to be the only site that offers online diagnosis of your unwell baby's symptoms as well as providing information on the complaint itself. Perhaps others are understandably worried about discouraging parents from seeing their doctor. But if you can't make it to the GP immediately, you can at least find out whether to panic and what to do to alleviate your baby's discomfort, using the step-by-step Illness Diagnosis Chart to identify your baby's ailment. This sensibly includes parent-friendly information and advice on only a few common complaints, such as coughing or mumps, otherwise obliging you to visit your doctor for a full diagnosis, but you can read about many other conditions, from tummy ache to hand, foot and mouth diseases, in the A-Z of Child Health. There are also substantial sections on crying, colic and feeding, plus the option to consult both medical experts and other parents online.

PARENTSPLACE.COM

www.parentsplace.com ★★★★

Most of the specific baby areas of this packed but tidy site cover developmental issues such as thumb-sucking and sight and sound, so go straight to the Health department for clear information on a range of conditions. The Illnesses section, like the rest of the content, comprises short articles on a range of ailments such as allergies, colds and flu, bacterial infections and even diseases that can be caught from animals, all of which makes soothing and informative reading for worried parents. For a straightforward guide to spotting symptoms and alleviating them at home, the First Aid kit offers plenty of detailed and sensible advice, including the use of oatmeal baths to relieve the itching of chicken pox. Both the Baby Care and Newborn Care sections feature rather too many specialist topics, though the articles under Colic/Gasiness and Breastfeeding Basics are helpful. It's a pity there isn't a single index of ailments for the whole site, but if you're really stuck you can always email the resident experts with your questions.

Smallfolk: baby health and childcare content from Great Ormond Street Hospital

NET DOCTOR

www.netdoctor.co.uk/children

★★★★

The children's health area of Net Doctor, winner of this year's *the net* award for best medical site, provides clear and concise information and advice for each disease in its list of familiar child and baby illnesses, certainly enough to put worried parents in the picture. Each entry is neatly broken down under simple headings such as What are the symptoms? or How is it treated?, and includes answers to the most likely questions raised by each illness. And if you need to know more you can email a question to an online doctor and receive an answer within 24 hours. There's an extensive list of articles on broader children's health issues, too.

KEEP KIDS HEALTHY

www.keepkidshealthy.com ★★★

Some of the content on this site tends towards the technical, but when there is so much on offer it's still a valuable resource. Most useful for more familiar complaints are the guides to Common Infections and Common Problems; it's easier still to go to the Index of Topics, which features an extensive range of ailments, from cough to cerebral palsy, runny nose to rabies. For symptoms like runny nose you can follow links to work out if it's, say, a cold or hayfever that your baby is suffering from. The First Aid and Safety section has a comprehensive selection of accidents, though in places the treatment advice seems a little scant. That this is a US site is pretty clear from entries on snake bites and gun safety.

BBC HEALTH: PARENTING

www.bbc.co.uk/health/parenting

★★★

Not everything comes naturally to new parents, and if you're at your wits' end trying to cope with your baby's crying, colic or erratic sleeping patterns, you'll find some comforting words, sometimes with cheering illustrations, in the Your Baby section in Parenting at Health at BBC Online. There's also a short but helpful guide to spotting whether your child is ill, plus a neat list of Common Complaints and what to do about them. Infectious Diseases is similarly succinct, but usefully includes the incubation period and infectiousness of each disease. Not a hugely detailed site, but enough to calm an anxious parent before they get to the GPs.

SMALLFOLK.COM

www.smallfolk.com ★★★

It's reassuring to know that the content on this site has been put together with the help of Great Ormond Street Hospital Children's

@ If you have to bookmark one...

BABYCENTRE

www.babycentre.co.uk ★★★★★

A friendly but knowledgeable tone makes BabyCentre a reassuring site for parents wanting to know more about their baby's illness. Probably the first port of call will be the Health area of the main Baby section, where the content is presented in the form of answers to questions most likely to be asked about each ailment. Some of the entries are also available in the Sound Advice section, such as 'My baby turns onto her front to sleep. Is this safe?' or 'How do we cope with colic?'. It would help if the conditions were given in alphabetical order, but the list isn't overly long so they're easy enough to pick out. The detailed travel section includes child-friendly hotels in the UK, plus a helpful list of contents for a First Aid kit. Other aspects of child care when travelling include how to cope with your youngster crying on an air flight. The rest of the site provides advice on all sorts of aspects of child care, from how to cut nails to bathing your baby. And if you can't find the answer to your question anywhere on the site, you can email it to an expert or post it on the bulletin board to see if other parents can help. And because baby's mental health is as important as its physical health, there's a lullaby lyrics area so you can make sure your baby isn't forever troubled by not knowing what happened at the end of 'Rock-a-bye-baby' – then again, perhaps that's best...

BabyCentre: covers all aspects of baby care in a friendly way

WORDS: ALEX NEWBY; PICTURES: CORBIS

Biting a clothes peg: not the most reliable form of contraception

Charity, and there's definitely an element of the children's hospital environment in the neat design, with its white space and perfect, coloured balloons. The site isn't exclusively about babies, but there's plenty of approachable, clear information on illnesses from which they can suffer. In the Child Health section, you'll find such categories as infections, feeding, digestion and bones, each with a list of conditions, their symptoms and the action to be taken. There's plenty on child care, too, including feeding, sleeping, crying and toilet training, plus a child development section, so you can keep track of other areas of your baby's wellbeing.

He has an unsettling enthusiasm for rashes

DR PAULA

www.drpaula.com ★★★

Although it offers plenty of info on childhood medical conditions, including those suffered by babies, the most useful area of this site is the list of doctors in regions and towns all over the world; so if you're travelling with tots or taking them to live abroad, you'll always know where to find medical advice. The A-Z of Childhood Conditions lists in excess of 350 diseases and ailments, but as most are rare or listed by their scientific names, and the content varies from extensive details to no more than a brief description, you may find the A-Z of Topics the best way to look up the more familiar childhood complaints, such as chicken pox, colds, diaper (nappy) rash and vomit. There's a handy list of items for your medicine cabinet, including items essential for baby health

UKPARENTS

www.ukparents.co.uk ★★★★

The author of most of the articles on this site, Dr David Garwood, has a slightly unsettling enthusiasm for certain rashes, on the grounds of their rareness, and takes a strange pleasure in describing his 'favourite case of diarrhoea, acrodermatitis enteropathica, (because of it's wonderful name)'. But his passion and interest in child health shines through in his highly accessible pieces on conditions major and minor, from nasal congestion to measles and – ouch – when your toddler catches his winky in his zip. Each of the FAQs usefully begins with the age of the child so you can find the one most relevant to you.

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

ONLINE DIAGNOSES

InteliHealth
www.intelihealth.com
A full and frank site to help solve problems. Also includes up-to-date health news and an email newsletter service.

MayoClinic.com
www.mayoclinic.com
Features a personalised health planner, online weight-loss programme and news briefs.

Pocket Doctor
www.pocketdoctor.co.uk
Dr Phil Hammond, from BBC's *Trust Me, I'm a Doctor* outlines questions you should ask your GP; also features a symptom analyser and online GP advice.

Quackwatch
www.quackwatch.com
As a member of the Consumer Federation of America, this site endeavours to combat health-related frauds while encouraging visitors to make sound choices.

DIETING SITES

Big Sisters
www.bigsisters.co.uk
Find inspiration on this site, where six British women are endeavouring to lose a combined 20 stone before July 2001.

Prevention
www.healthyideas.com
Online women's magazine, featuring recipes and fitness tips.

3 Fat Chicks on a Diet!
www.3fatchicks.com
Find motivation through the success stories of three formerly overweight sisters. Includes recipe and exercise ideas.

WeightWatchers.com
uk.weightwatchers.com
With personalised sites for dozens of countries, Weight Watchers is determined to help people lose weight with a 'point system'; also includes recipe ideas.

OFFICIAL HEALTH SITES

NHS Direct
www.doh.gov.uk/nhsexec/direct.htm
Get help from the NHS 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

BMA Online
www.bma.org.uk
Provides information on how to become a doctor or nurse.

British Dental Health Foundation
www.dentalhealth.org.uk
Get your dentistry queries answered online.

NEWSGROUP

misc.kids.health
Discuss all matters relating to children's health here.

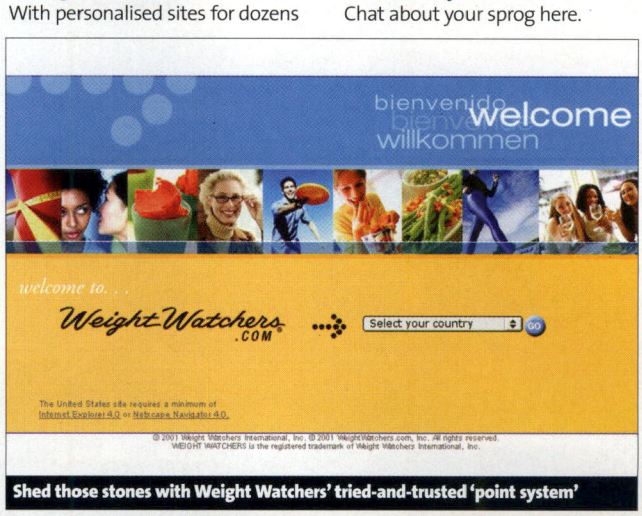
MAILING LIST

Join a group for expectant parents or those with newborns by sending an email marked 'info babynews' to ***majordomo@lists.pregnancytoday.com***.

Pocket Doctor: online GP service

CHAT ROOM

Baby Corner
www.thebabycorner.com
Chat about your sprog here.



Shed those stones with Weight Watchers' tried-and-trusted 'point system'

NEED MORE? Useful health addresses The Directory p78

FOCUS:// Encyclopedias

The answer's online

Whether it's homework or idle query, you'll find what you need in online encyclopedias

THE COLUMBIA ENCYCLOPEDIA

www.bartleby.com/65 ★★★★

The online version of the *Columbia Encyclopedia* continues a tradition started in the 1920s when Clarke Fisher Ansley and Columbia University Press recognised the need for 'first aid' for those who read. With the print encyclopedia's sixth edition being published this very year, it's bang up to date, as demonstrated by an enthusiastic translation to the Web. Enthusiastic, in fact, to the tune of six-and-a-half million words, 51,000 entries and 80,000 hypertext links.

It gets kudos (but not an extra star) for explaining the roots of the word 'encyclopedia' – the Greek phrase *enkuklios paideia*, meaning 'general education' – on the front page, but perhaps more attention should have been paid to livening up the text-only entries. Six-and-a-half million words get a bit much when it's all strung together (and yes, you can read it alphabetically using 'previous' and 'next' buttons). That said, it does cover its subjects thoroughly.

Of course, it helps to be part of the expansive Bartleby.com network, through which an omnipresent dropdown menu gives access to thesauruses, quotation compilations, the King James Bible and much more. A very useful bookmark, if not terribly easy on the eyes – but then when was 'first aid' ever pleasant?

@ If you have to bookmark one...

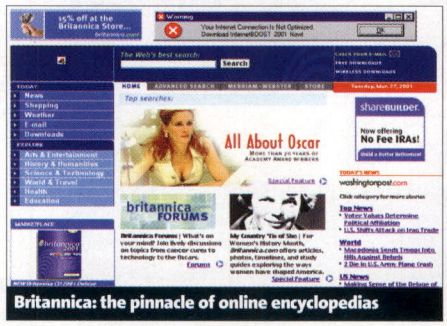
BRITANNICA.COM

www.britannica.com ★★★★★

The Big Daddy Rabbit of the offline encyclopedia world made the news a couple of months ago when its servers crashed due to the demand for a picture of Britney Spears' belly-button. Then again, overwhelming demand for Britannica is nothing new; its early days were blighted by crashes as demand far exceeded capacity. That's been sorted now – the odd teen-propelled overload aside – and Britannica has predictably taken its place in the vanguard of online encyclopedias.

There's nothing magical or secretive about how Britannica manages to be the best in the business. It's simply a matter of providing the best information on a given topic. (As a yardstick, we searched all encyclopedias for info on The Beatles.)

Yes, the writing can sometimes be reminiscent of that of an Oxford don; for example, the Beatles entry includes the memorable line 'Musicians performing in the 19th century certainly excited a frenzy – one thinks of Franz Liszt'. But there's no denying the depth of knowledge in these pages, nor can the reader ignore the sheer number of hyperlinks to related topics; over two dozen in our sample Beatles entry, from Liszt to LSD, and Sinatra to skiffle. Perhaps it's lack of room thanks to these extensive entries which leads to Britannica having slightly fewer audio-visual aids than some of its competitors, notably Funk and Wagnalls. However, Britannica deserves its place at the pinnacle of online encyclopedias, not least because you can now entertain yourself on long, boring journeys by searching the 44 million-word Britannica database from your Palm VII.



Britannica: the pinnacle of online encyclopedias

ABOUT.COM

about.com ★★★★

Here's a good example of the Internet taking a good idea and making it better. Halfway between an encyclopedia and a discussion forum, About.com calls itself 'the human Internet' and indeed there's nothing remotely mechanical about it. Hundreds of topics in the About network are presided over by resident experts, but they're merely the conduits for the closest thing on the Internet to a transcribed oral history – which is, when it comes down to it, what encyclopedias are. So tap in your search enquiry and you'll be presented with dozens of options and subject strands, enabling you to get what you need.

As an inevitable by-product of linking to amateur sites, some of the writing is overly enthusiastic, leading to a lack of authoritative gravitas. However, facts are checked and the lively feel is refreshing next to some of the other, somewhat stale, encyclopedias. Granted, it can be tricky to locate the definitive information you need amidst the exclamation marks and fan-fiction, but if scholars stick to the Essentials section they should find out more than they'll ever need to know. And that's enough for us.

Barry's interest in pickle varieties was bordering on the obsessive

ENCYCLOPEDIA.COM

www.encyclopedia.com ★★★

In every sphere of Web life there is a golden URL to which everyone aspires, and the good people at Electric Library must have been delirious with pleasure when they found this one was free for use. But having the URL is only half the battle, given that any surfers typing

WORDS: GARY PARKINSON; PICTURES: CORBIS

Funk & Wagnalls: never mind the silly name, feel the quality of the information

in random URLs will only stay if the product is good enough, so what about the content?

Well, it's certainly useful; Encyclopedia.com is informative and easy to use, its 50,000 articles linked to millions of pictures and further articles on various pay-sites (and, curiously, rival encyclopedia Encarta). But while it's good for a quick search and will doubtless answer many a question, there's a lingering feeling that Encyclopedia.com fails to fulfil the potential of the Internet: there's no audio, video or even photo back-up to the text unless you get your credit card out. Making each page look like a book and the search engine resemble a bookshelf isn't going to wash. A useful site, but more effort is needed for it to become an authoritative Internet encyclopedia in more than just name.

You'll be presented with dozens of options and strands

FUNK & WAGNALLS

www.funkandwagnalls.com

★★★★★

Funk and Wagnalls may not be a big name (or even a sensible name) but behind that URL lies a wealth of information, supplemented by photos, audio and video footage.

A simple but attractive layout keeps a variety of options, including dictionary, thesaurus and atlas, on display at all times. The intelligent front page links to topics both current (foot and mouth, the death of Dale Earnhardt) and historical (women's suffrage, albeit only in the USA), and indeed, an unintentionally hilarious account of the hard-fought right to re-label prunes as dried plums in California.

Our Beatles search yielded more words and pictures than any other site except Britannica, to the extent of including such psychosociological mumbo-jumbo as the following: 'The Beatles became a symbol of deferred adulthood, a magical postponement of post-adolescent excitement and experimentation'. But at least before being subjected to the waffle you get a solid breakdown of the subject, complete with video footage of the Fabs arriving at London Airport and a sound clip, although disappointingly it's of a lone Lennon in 1975 rather than a cut-and-thrust early interview or even, heavens, a tune.

ENCARTA

encarta.msn.com

★★★

It's always been one of Microsoft's great strengths to, shall we say, absorb other people's ideas into a user-friendly package. The Web site for Encarta, MS's popular CD-Rom encyclopedia, continues the familiar pattern.

For a start, the search engine, 'Encarta Enquire', is an Ask Jeeves-style facility, which lets you ask a plain-English question, but if you have little patience with the sort of irrelevant results often thrown up by Ask Jeeves, you'd be better off looking elsewhere.

The 'Experts' section, meanwhile, half-inches About.com's style with guest boffins introducing guides to a variety of popular subjects. Warm relationships with external sites like Quoteland.com widen the available information. And like many multinationals, MSN provides French, German and British homepages.

But when it comes to the crunch, Encarta just isn't that informative. Our Beatles search on this American site yielded brief text and no pictures, although for some reason visuals are available, plus extra text, at the British version (***www.encarta.msn.co.uk***). What, so the Beatles aren't internationally known?

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

QUOTATIONS AND PROVERBS

Bartleby.com
www.bartleby.com
Quotes to spice up essays, letters and speeches.

Famous Quotations Network
www.famous-quotations.com
Search for quotations by country or author.

EXAM RESOURCES

Topmarks Education
www.topmarks.co.uk
Help with hundreds of topics.

revisiontime.com
www.revisiontime.com
Useful links for various subjects.

Learn.co.uk
www.learn.co.uk
Handy tips for five- to 19-year-olds.

S-Cool!
www.s-cool.co.uk
Provides revision material for GCSE and A-level students.

Schoolsnet
www.schoolsnet.com
Award-winning education site for students, parents and teachers.

DISTANCE LEARNING

The Open University
www-icdl.open.ac.uk
The Open University on the Net.

Tele-School Online
www.tele-school.org
Learn and interact online.

CONVERTERS AND SYMBOLS

MegaConverter 2
www.megaconverter.com/mega2
Convert just about any measurement to another.

Symbols.com
www.symbols.com
Online list of graphic symbols.

PICK UP A USEFUL SKILL

Cyber Film School Moviemaking Website
www.cyberfilmschool.com
Learn how to make your own films.

Learnfree.com
www.learnfree.com
Features RealVideo tutorials.

LEARN AN INSTRUMENT

Piano World
www.pianoworld.com
Tickle those ivories like a pro.

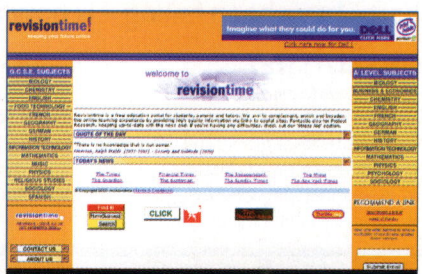
Cyberfret.com
www.cyberfret.com
'Online college of guitar wisdom'. Tutorials and chords available here.

NEWSGROUP

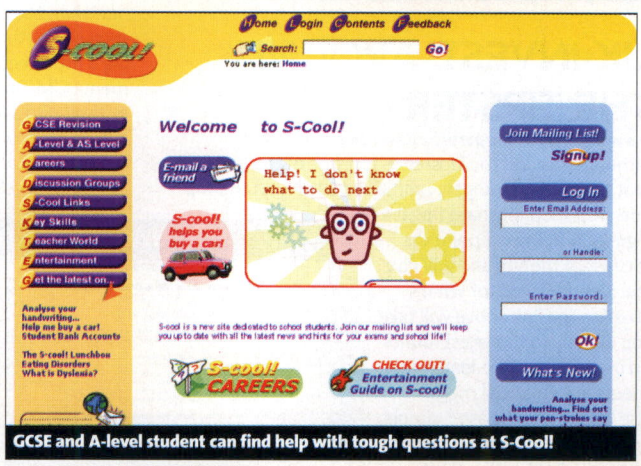
aus.education.open-learning
If you've embarked on an open learning course, why not discuss your work with others?

MAILING LIST

Find out more about online learning by sending an email marked 'info onlearn-l' to ***majordomo@dmu.ac.uk***.



Find a link to any subject at revisiontime.com



GCSE and A-level student can find help with tough questions at S-Cool!

NEED MORE? Useful addresses for kids The Directory p78

FOCUS:// Shares tipsters

The stock market opera was a hit

Good buy for now

Shares have been falling – is now the time to buy? Don't ask us, ask the best of the online tipsters...

HEMSCOTT.NET

www.hemscott.com ★★★

This is one of those all-too-familiar financial sites that greets you with a bewildering array of options. Endless banners, links, tickers, menus and flashing logos assault the senses. So where to begin? In the menu on the left, click on Hemscott Invest under the heading Financial News; down the right-hand menu of the page you'll find the Tiptracker links; choose Today's Tips for advice from the *The Times*, *The Independent* and *The Daily Telegraph*. For more in-depth tips you'll need to register for the Hemscott Analyst email newsletter; punch the link on the home page. There's a two-week free trial; after that it costs £10 a month.

@ If you have to bookmark one...

UK-INVEST: AROUND THE TIPSTERS

www.uk-invest.com/perp/tipsters.html ★★★★★

Although Around the Tipsters is just one of the features that makes the strangely capitalised UK-iNvest the top one-stop shop for share tips, it's a great jumping-off point for the rest of the site and will give you a good flavour of what's on offer. The link above will take you directly to the latest round-up of picks from the leading tip sheets and financial mags. The layout is text-based, simple and intuitive: company names appear in bold with a short paragraph underneath and a link to further information where appropriate. Scroll down to the bottom of the right-hand column to find a menu of links to more summaries, then, having whet your appetite, you can dig a little deeper into the site from the top left-hand menu. Click on any of these headings and the tree will expand into a list of tantalising sub-heads.

Give Opinion & Analysis a shot; there's a jumble of options here arranged both by theme and pundit. Alternatively, click on What's New to access the Broker's Reports, where you can check out the ratings from the likes of Merrill Lynch, JP Morgan and other financial luminaries. All in all, this is far and away the most comprehensive free UK tip site, and if you're new to investing you'll no doubt feel a little overwhelmed with the sheer quantity of advice, so spend some time sampling the different sections until you find a tipster who speaks your language.

UK-iNvest: the latest picks from leading tip sheets

THE MOTLEY FOOL

www.fool.co.uk ★★★★

Motley Fool has a user-friendly mix of features for beginners and experts alike, making it the first port of call for anyone who wants to learn the nuts and bolts of investment. Navigating the site isn't as tricky as it first looks, especially if you stick with the Jump To menu in the top right corner. All the headings are self-explanatory; Strategies and Ideas is the place to head to if you're looking for the latest tips. The page is divided into two categories – strategies and ideas – and tips are organised around investment schemes such as the Beating the Footsie Mechanical Strategy and the High-Yield Buy-and-Forget Strategy. You'll need to explore both sides of the page to find what you're looking for.

CITY PIGEON

www.citypigeon.co.uk ★★★★

City Pigeon provides the best news and analysis of UK stocks on the Web. There's no original content on this site: the menu on the left-hand frame is simply a large collection of

WORDS: CHRIS HADLEY ; PICTURES: CORBIS

links to other sites. However, every tool you could possibly need to play the stock market is intelligently listed and clearly categorised here. Under Share Tipsters you'll find a small selection of links to some of the most highly-respected tipsters on the Web.

SHOW ME THE MONEY

www.channel4.com/showmethemoney ★★★

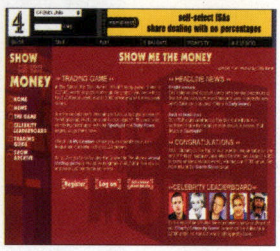
This is a virtual trading game based on last year's successful Channel 4 series. Many analysts say that the tips on the show had a noticeable impact on personal investment decisions in the days after it was broadcast. If you're playing for real, the main benefit of this site is the excellent round-up of daily analysis from the financial press in the News menu. You can also read transcripts of the show's 60-second pitches for hundreds of UK companies.

MRS COHEN

www.mrscohen.com ★★★★

Granny knows best, and 63-year-old Bernice Cohen knows better than most. Don't be put off by the numerous photos of Mrs Cohen looking more than a little ill at ease: she's an old hand at this game, having penned a financial column for the *Mail on Sunday* for four years and hosted two series for Channel 4.

The home page is a straightforward mix of financial news, and most of the links take you to sage advice on savings and other how-tos for beginners. Tip hunters need to head straight for the Diary and Portfolio tab, where there are three options: Latest Diaries, My Portfolio and Stocks to Watch. Plump for My Portfolio, which shows what Mrs Cohen owns, what she paid for them and why she bought them. Click through the company names for more details. The left-hand menu provides quick links to the diary entries, and her pick of Stocks to Watch. It's well worth registering to receive regular email updates.



Most of the links take you to sage advice

CITYWIRE

www.citywire.co.uk ★★★★

Citywire's home page is a mass of links to the rest of the site, but the tidy design makes it a cinch to find what you want. Citywire Insider is where you can track down tips and analysis from top columnist Edmond Jackson, who made his name writing a weekly diary for *The Sunday Telegraph*. Jackson writes a new column every day from the perspective of a private investor, and his page displays links to articles for the current week and his archived column. Among the useful features are Recommendations, which pulls together a collection of companies in the news that might be worth a punt, and Go for Brokers, which keeps you up to date with the latest company ratings from the City.

TIPSHEETS

www.tipsheets.co.uk ★★★

Not for those in search of free advice, this site offers subscription details for a handful of paid-for tip sheets for the serious investor. Of more interest to the general investor is the Small Company Selector. There's a thorough description of the newsletter which monitors the small company sector of the UK stock market, an order form for subscribers, and a sample issue.

MICHAEL WALTERS

www.michaelwalters.com ★★★★

Michael Walters' smiling face beams at you as the main page loads; it looks like a face you can trust, so we might be on to a good thing here. Walters certainly has the credentials, as you can find out by clicking on Welcome. Having satisfied yourself that he's worth listening to, skip back to the home page for company analyses written in the highly-accessible style you'd expect from a man who worked for the *Daily Mail* for 21 years. As well as various recommendations, there are articles on the state of the market and a section on the Stop-loss System, which underlies Walters' strategy. At the heart of the site is Mike's Companies – a list of selected companies and the articles he's written about them. An excellent, no-nonsense Web site.

Mrs Cohen: granny knows best

@CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

Keep on top of money news with the the *Financial Times* online

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Investment Week
www.invweek.co.uk
Monetary advice from the in-depth *Investment Week*.

eye4money
www.eye4money.com
UK and US financial information.

hemscott.NET
www.hemscott.com
Get access to a veritable goldmine of analysis from this easy-to-use, no-non-sense site.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Interactive Investor International
www.iii.co.uk
Advice for individual investors.

Guardian Unlimited Money
money.guardian.co.uk
Sound financial advice from *The Guardian*.

MoneySupermarket
www.moneysupermarket.com
Offers tools and advice to help you waste less of your cash.

Pick up some advice at the Money supermarket

MONEY NEWS AND SHARE PRICES

FT.com
www.ft.com
The mother of all money sites, from the makers of the financial bible.

Bloomberg.com UK
www.bloomberg.co.uk
Up-to-date data for the professional investor.

Sharepages.com
www.sharepages.com
News from all the markets in an at-a-glance, easy-to-navigate format.

SHARE TRADING

Stocktrade
www.stocktrade.co.uk
Keep your finger on the pulse with 'the UK's first online broker', which offers real-time prices.

Barclays Stockbrokers
www.barclays-stockbrokers.co.uk
Real-time share dealing from one of the biggest names in banking.

CMC Group PLC
www.deal4free.com
The first online commission-free Share (CFD) trading service; plus, real-time dealing prices.

buy.co.uk
www.buy.co.uk/personal
This site claims it can save you an average of £150 a year on utility bills in just 10 minutes!

Office of Fair Trade Personal Finance Guide
www.oft.gov.uk/html/finance
Advice from the Government.

TRY A NEWSGROUP

uk.finance
Advice on a wide variety of financial topics.

CHAT ROOM

Investor MSN
investor.msn.com
Discuss the world of money with other finance fans to your heart's content.

NEED MORE? **This month's bargains** Dealfinder p30
Useful money addresses The Directory p78

FOCUS:// Buying garden equipment

Garden of E-den

Summer's coming – time to tart up the garden with some new accessories

ARMCHAIR GARDENING

www.armchairgardening.com

★★★★

The jovial cartoon gent on the front page welcomes you to a veritable emporium of outdoor purchasables. The Armchair Gardener's online shop section claims to offer a minimum of 15 percent off RRP; coupled with free UK delivery, you could find yourself doing more sprucing for your money than you bargained for. There are perhaps a few too many categories (does teak furniture really warrant a separate page to aluminium?) but at least it means you should be able to find what you need with relative ease. Head to the Tool Shed to get your forks and shears, then choose somewhere to house them from the Garden Shed selection. If you need the clothes to look the part, you can even get those here – you can't quibble with the Town & Country Thinsulate-lined leather-palmed ladies' gloves for £7.36. We also liked the idea of an Instant Gazebo ('erected by one person in 30 seconds') for just under £100. And you don't even need to be a member to order your goods, although members often receive further discounts.

Armchair Gardening: wide selection

EASY GARDENS

www.easygardens.net ★★★★

Ever judged a book by its cover? We'd heard good things about Easy Gardens, but when we checked out the site and were affronted by a barrage of red and green there was a great temptation to run away. However, if you can manage to ignore the shocking colour scheme and concentrate on the goods on offer, you'll find Easy Gardens could kit out your entire garden at a decent price. There are savings of up to 25 percent across the board, so whether you're after a teak half-cartwheel bench or an Alko silent shredder, it's worth braving the appalling layout to sniff out the bargains. If you save enough you might be able to afford the Swim 'n' Play Above-Ground Pole Pool at £1,295, or at least the £30 paddling pool. Easy Gardens is little more than an online catalogue, but it does let PC users download a free aquarium screensaver. That could save you a few bob – don't bother getting the real thing, just leave the monitor on in the background.

GREENFINGERS.COM

www.greenfingers.com ★★★★

Fences! Don't write in to correct us, but we believe that Greenfingers is the only site to offer fences, which are essential if the rest of the world isn't going to wander in and trample on your petunias. Or, indeed, your herbaceous perennials, which were on offer at six for the price of five when we checked the site. If that doesn't sound like the most amazingly generous offer ever, that's because Greenfingers isn't a bargain-basement kind of place; it's a considered, well-ordered portal with workshops, a magazine and a 'garden club' in addition to the superstore section. And everywhere there's the spectre of George, the slightly spooky 3D cartoon gardener. It's such a neat and ordered site, there's even a shopping subsection called 'tidying up', though several of the selections were temporarily out of stock. Tidy as Titchmarsh and equally as appealing, we suspect, to much of the target population, Greenfingers is a good all-in site for those who wish to spruce up the garden.

GONEGARDENING.COM

www.gonegardening.com ★★★★

GoneGardening – 'Where gardening comes naturally' – caught our eye with an offer of flower prints at an astounding £39.99. Not exactly what you might want when you're gagging to get gardening, but it might brighten up the lounge. Thankfully, the prices aren't all so steep: the Special Offers section was offering aprons (the type that go around your waist) and car boot liners for just four quid when we popped in. There's a slightly esoteric mix of buyables available, leaning less toward the practical than other sites. Here's the place to come for garden ornaments; fancy a fairy fountain with pump? £60 and it's

@ If you have to bookmark one...

CROCUS

www.crocus.co.uk ★★★★★

Much like the flower after which it is named, the first glimpse of the Crocus site is rich in promise and anticipation. While the arrival of the flower means spring is just around the corner, the Crocus home page is beautifully designed in cool blues with attractive photos of flowers to catch the eye. Subsequent pages maintain the well-designed theme. But what turns Crocus from a wallflower into a hardy perennial is the quality and quantity of advice and product offers. You may not have £749 to splash out on a Robomower (yes, it does exactly what you'd expect), but you could bag some cobalt blue crushed glass for £13.75 or 30 litres of compost for less than three quid. Crocus also offers a range of barbecue paraphernalia; well, there's no point having a beautifully manicured garden if you don't invite people round to enjoy it with you.

A great benefit of the Crocus site if, like most of us, you're the type who gradually does up the garden bit by bit on a weekly basis, is the What's New section, which informs you of all the latest products. However, if we're being honest, there's so much on offer on the Crocus site that you'll struggle to choose from what's already there. Relaxing to be in, pleasant to look at, attractively arranged – Crocus is everything the good garden should be and more.

Crocus: beautifully designed, plus high on quality and quantity

WORDS: GARY PARKINSON; PICTURES: KOBAL

Online shopping: it's easy to get carried away

yours – or perhaps the double-lidded unpeeled willow hamper. And if it's not just your fingers that are green, you can utilise the Organic Gardening section to make yours the most environmentally friendly garden in the neighbourhood.

DIG-IT.CO.UK

www.dig-it.co.uk

★★★★★

'Our mission,' states Dig-it's front page, 'is to inspire you to make the most of your outside space, be it balcony, roof terrace, small garden or country estate.' A fine mission indeed for our purposes, and the slideshow of potential purchases had us scrambling for the credit card. Another nicely-designed site, but in a more commercial style than Crocus, Dig-it feels like a garden centre dressed as Harvey Nicks. That's not a criticism: it's nice to see bulbs and seeds sold with a dash of panache, and some of the furniture available here is beautiful: the hammocks had us longing for lazy summer days, even if you could book yourself a fortnight's holiday for the £229.50 you'd have to shell out for the Paraguay hammock. As well as barbecues, trellises and pond equipment, Dig-it offers the widest range we found of light and sound – perfect for summer parties.

It's nice to see bulbs and seeds sold with panache

GROGRO.COM

www.grogro.com

★★★★

You're on solid ground with GroGro: it's the e-commerce engine of the Royal Horticultural Society, as trusty a bunch of soil-stirrers as you could wish for. Perhaps strangely, the focus isn't on plants; although they're available, they're outnumbered by the other products on offer. Gardeners with grand designs can't help but click on the 'Arbours, arches & gazebos' link, while the more practical horticulturalist might prefer to stick to the fertilisers and propagation equipment. Unusually, and usefully, the user is given the opportunity to browse each subsection by manufacturer – which could be a timesaver if there's a particular brand name you know and trust.

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

CLEANING TIPS

Dr Clean
www.drclean.co.uk
Complete fabric-cleaning advice, including how-tos for carpets and curtains, and a 'comprehensive stain-removal chart'.

How To Clean Anything.com
www.howtocleananything.com
Just in case you make a mess.

ELECTRIC APPLIANCES

Bes Direct
www.buyelectricaldirect.co.uk
What's a home without the right accoutrements? This online supplier of home entertainment and domestic appliances will help your pad buzz and at discounted prices. Includes free delivery in the mainland.

Homeware Brands Ltd
www.homewares.co.uk
The place to go for Gaggia appliances, from espresso machines to ice-cream makers.

FIXTURES

Jim Lawrence Ironwork
www.jim-lawrence.co.uk
Curtain poles, door handles, lights, kitchen and bathroom fittings, and lamps using traditional blacksmith's skills.

Lightsonthe.net
www.lightsonthe.net
The 'largest e-commerce lighting store on the Internet' offers over 100,000 products, from ceiling and wall fixtures to outdoor lighting and magnifying lamps.

PLUMBING

Plumb World
www.plumbworld.co.uk
Put an end to leaking faucets and tacky accessories with well-priced plumbing goods. Includes a 60-day money-back guarantee and free shipping for most of the UK.

REPAIRS

MisterFixit dotcom
www.misterfixit.com
Repair advice for low prices.

The Natural Handyman
www.naturalhandyman.com
US site with tips and ideas. You can email to ***Subscribe@naturalhandyman.com*** to get on a mailing list offering home help and humour.

WINDOW DRESSINGS

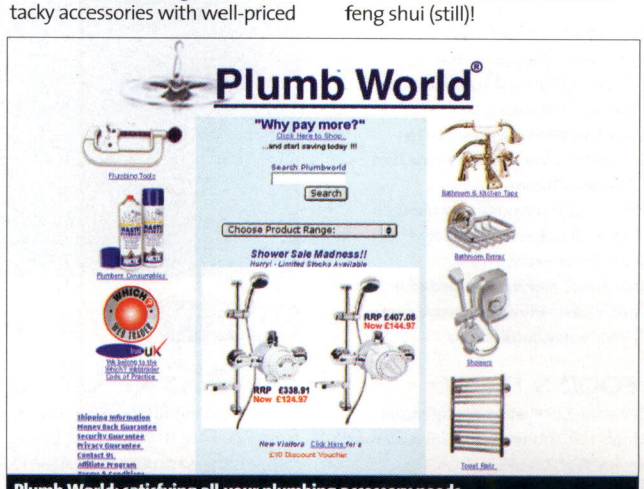
Easyblind
www.easyblind.co.uk
Scupper the enjoyment of your nosey neighbours with made-to-measure blinds. Check out the Special Offer section, too.

CHAT TO OTHERS DIY ENTHUSIASTS

DoItYourself.com
www.doityourself.com
Reckons to be the first and leading Net community offering an ABC of DIY.

Heavy metal: Jim Lawrence Ironwork

Remodel Online
www.remodelonline.com
For an A-to-Z of yankee-doodle-dandy-style home improvements, look no further. It even includes feng shui (still)!



Plumb World: satisfying all your plumbing accessory needs

NEED MORE? Useful homes addresses The Directory p78

The Directory

Welcome to our exclusive compendium of those top Internet sites you'll need time and again

<BANKING>
Online banks
Abbey National ***www.abbeynational.co.uk***
Alliance & Leicester ***www.alliance-leicester.co.uk***
Barclays ***www.barclays.co.uk***
Co-operative Bank ***www.co-operativebank.co.uk***
Direct Line ***www.directline.com***
Egg ***www.egg.co.uk***
First Direct ***www.firstdirect.co.uk***
First-e ***www.first-e.com***
Halifax ***www.halifax-online.co.uk***
HSBC ***www.banking.hsbc.co.uk***
Lloyds TSB ***www.lloydstsb.co.uk***
Nationwide ***www.nationwide.co.uk***
Natwest ***www.natwest.com***
Royal Bank Of Scotland ***www.royalbankscot.co.uk***
Smile ***www.smile.co.uk***
Virgin Direct ***www.virgin-direct.co.uk***

<CLASSIFIEDS>
Ad-Mart ***www.ad-mart.co.uk***
Economist Classifieds Market Place ***www.classified.economist.com***
Eureka-net ***www.eureka-net.co.uk***
Free Classified ***www.freeclassified.co.uk***
itsbazaar.com ***www.itsbazaar.com***
JJ Electronic Plaza Classifieds ***www.jjplaza.com/onlinead***
Localads ***www.localads.net***
London's Classifieds ***www.mercurie.co.uk/londonclassified***
LOOT ***www.loot.com***
netTRADER ***www.nettrader.co.uk***
PhotoAds ***www.photoads.co.uk***
Reel Exchange ***www.reelexchange.co.uk***
Sellitnet ***www.sellitnet.com***

<DOWNLOADS>
Apple ***asu.info.apple.com***
Download Net ***www.download.net***
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Freeware ***www.freewarehome.com***
ICQ ***www.icq.com***
Memoware ***www.memoware.com***
Microsoft ***www.microsoft.com***
Real Player ***www.real.com***
Shareware ***www.download.com***
Shockwave ***www.shockwave.com***
ZDNet ***www.hotfiles.com***

<FOOD & DRINK>
decanter.com ***www.decanter.com***
Meals For You ***www.mealsforyou.com***
RecipeWeb.co.uk ***www.recipeweb.co.uk***
Restaurants.co.uk ***www.restaurants.co.uk***
RoomService ***www.roomservice.co.uk***
squaremeal.co.uk ***www.squaremeal.co.uk***
Taste ***www.taste.co.uk***
Toptable ***www.toptable.co.uk***
Uncorked ***www.uncorked.co.uk***

<GAMES>
Guides & companies
Dreamcast ***www.dreamcast.com***
Future Games Network ***www.fgnetwork.com***
GameCenter ***www.gamecenter.com***
Gamers.com ***www.gamers.com***
GameSpot ***www.gamespot.com***
GameSpyder ***www.gamespyder.com***
GameStats ***www.gamestats.com***
MacGaming ***www.maccentral.com/games***
MultiPlayer ***www.multiplayer.com***
Nintendo ***www.nintendo.com***
PlayStation ***www.playstation.com***
Sega ***www.sega-europe.com***
Total Video Games ***www.totalvideogames.com***

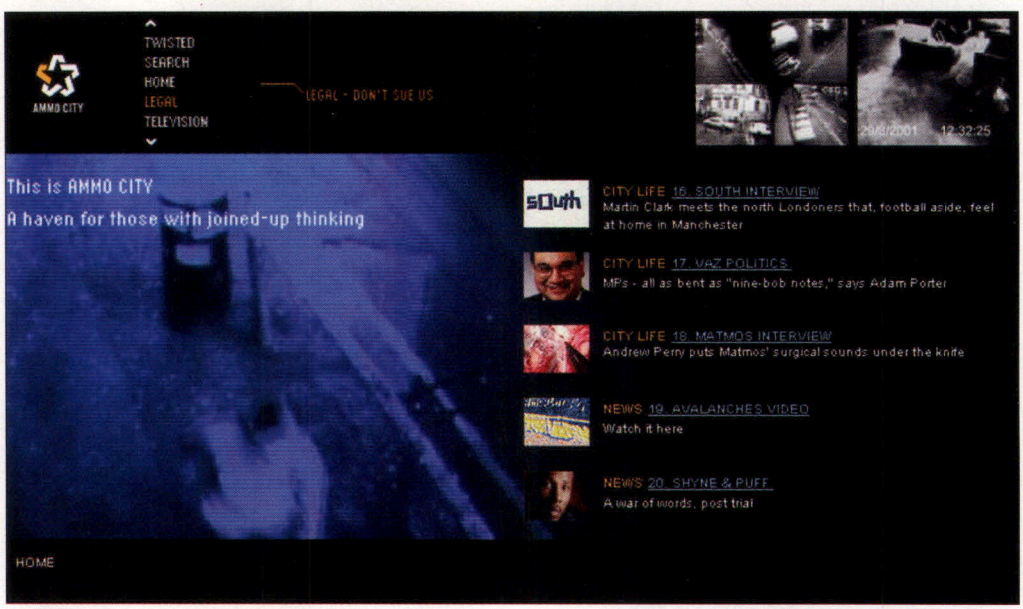
<GENEALOGY>
British Ancestral Research ***www.brit-a-r.demon.co.uk***
British Heraldic Institute ***www.kwtelecom.com/heraldry***
Family Search ***www.familysearch.com***
Genealogy Research Source ***www.genealogy.book www.pro.gov.uk***
Rootsweb ***www.rootsweb.com***

<GOVERNMENT>
Britain
Arts Council ***www.artscouncil.org.uk***
British Monarchy ***www.royal.gov.uk***
Department for Culture, Media and Sport ***www.culture.gov.uk***
Dept of Health ***www.doh.gov.uk***
Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions ***www.detr.gov.uk***
Downing St ***www.number-10.gov.uk***
Ministry of Defence ***www.mod.uk***
Open.gov.uk ***www.open.gov.uk***
Scottish Parliament ***www.scotland.gov.uk***
Welsh Assembly ***www.wales.gov.uk***

The World
Australia ***www.fed.gov.au***
China ***www.gov.cn***
European Commission ***europa.eu.int***
France ***www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr***
Germany ***www.bundesregierung.de***
Russia ***www.gov.ru***
United Nations ***www.un.org***
United States ***www.whitehouse.gov***

<HEALTH>
Doctors & diagnosis
Ask Dr Weil ***cgi.pathfinder.com/drweil***
Ask The Doc ***www.ask-the-doc.com***
BackCare ***www.backpain.org***
British Dental Association ***www.bda-dentistry.org.uk***
British Medical Journal ***www.bmj.com***
The Brompton Dental Clinic ***www.mercuryfree.co.uk***
Healthy Ideas ***www.healthyideas.com***
MedRef ***www.medscout.com***
Mental Health ***www.mentalhealth.com***
NetDoctor ***www.netdoctor.co.uk***
Patient ***www.patient.co.uk***
Pocket Doctor ***www.pocketdoctor.co.uk***

Support & information
Alcoholics Anonymous ***www.alcoholics-anonymous.org***



SOCIETY NEW ENTRY

LIVING IT UP ONLINE

There are a wealth of lifestyle magazines on the market, from *The Face* to *Wallpaper*, but where do the hip and happening go on the Net? Ammocity, of course – well, at least they should.

Strong journalism is combined with cool tracks to bring users the best of what's happening in fashion, art, music and culture. Some of the content available when we visited included news about the Human Rights Film Festival and what Ol' Dirty Bastard was up to, not to mention videos from Orbital and the excellent Avalanches. Exclusive music sets from the likes of the Rough Trade and Fat Cat labels was available to listen to while we surfed.

If your friends have deserted you, log onto Ammocity's chat room to find some new ones. Or visit the gig guide for recommendations for a great night out. Be sure to check out Ammocity's inspiring top 10s. We liked 'Top 10 luncheon meats'. Silly, but clever. ***www.ammocity.com***

WORDS: JENNIFER KEARNS

Alzheimer's Disease Society
www.alzheimers.org.uk
CancerBACUP
www.cancerbacup.org.uk
Centre For Online Addiction
netaddiction.com
Diabetes UK ***www.diabetic.org.uk***
Fitness Online ***www.fitnessonline.com***
HIV/AIDS Information & Links
www.brad.ac.uk/staff/ijhodgson/hivlinks.htm
National Meningitis Trust
www.meningitis-trust.org.uk
Natural Naturally
www.naturalnaturally.com
Smoking: Don't Give Up Giving Up
www.givingupsmoking.co.uk
ThinkNatural.com
www.thinknatural.com

<HOMES>

Estate agents

Bushells ***www.bushells.com***
Chancellors ***www.chancellors.co.uk***
CityLet ***www.citylet.com***
Cluttons Daniel Smith
www.cluttons.com
Foxtons ***www.foxtons.co.uk***
Friend & Falcke
www.friendandfalcke.co.uk
Goldschmidt Howland
www.goldschmidt-howland.co.uk
Hamptons ***www.hamptons.co.uk***
John D. Wood ***www.johndwood.co.uk***
Knight Frank ***www.knightfrank.co.uk***
Strutt & Parker
www.struttandparker.co.uk
Your Move ***www.your-move.co.uk***

Property finders

Accommodation Directory
www.accommodation.com
Assertahome ***www.assertahome.com***
Bamboo Avenue
www.bambooavenue.com
BBC Good Homes
www.goodhomes.beeb.com
Easier.co.uk ***www.easier.co.uk***
Edinburgh Solicitors Property Centre
www.espc.co.uk
Global Resident
www.globalresident.com
Homefile UK ***www.homefileuk.co.uk***
Home Free Home
www.homefreehome.co.uk
Homepages ***www.homepages.co.uk***
Home Sale ***www.home-sale.co.uk***
Home to Home
www.home-to-home.co.uk
HouseNet ***www.housenet.co.uk***
Internet Property Finder
www.propertyfinder.co.uk
Lets Direct ***www.letsdirect.co.uk***
Move.co.uk ***www.move.co.uk***
Pavilions of Splendour
www.heritage.co.uk
Property Sight
www.property-sight.co.uk
Property World
www.propertyworld.com
Propwatch ***www.propwatch.com***

<HUMOUR>

Comedy Online
www.comedyonline.co.uk
Comics.com ***www.comics.com***
Comedy Zone ***www.comedy-zone.net***
Cyber Comedian
webtamers.com/comedian.html
Funplanet ***www.funplanet.co.uk***
Funny ***www.funny.co.uk***
hahabonk ***www.hahabonk.com***
JokeDepot ***www.jokedepot.com***
JokePost ***www.jokepost.com***
Jongleurs ***www.jongleurs.com***
SoYouWanna ***www.soyouwanna.com***
The Onion ***www.theonion.com***
TV Go Home ***www.tvgohome.com***
Uproar ***www.uproar.com***

<JOBS>

Employment Agencies

Agency Central
www.agencycentral.co.uk
Brook Street ***www.brookstreet.co.uk***
Independent Appointments
www.indappts.co.uk
Manpower ***www.manpower.co.uk***
Reed ***www.reed.co.uk***

Job searches

Brilliant Careers
brilliantcareers.channel4.com
Easy-Jobs ***www.easy-jobs.co.uk***
Expat Network
www.expatnetwork.co.uk
Fish4Jobs ***www.fish4jobs.co.uk***
Gradunet ***www.gradunet.co.uk***
Guardian Unlimited Jobs
jobs.guardian.co.uk
Jobsearch UK ***www.jobsearch.co.uk***
Jobsin ***www.jobsin.co.uk***
Jobsite ***www.jobsite.co.uk***
Overseas Jobs ***www.overseasjobs.com***
Personnelnet ***www.personnelnet.com***
Stepstone ***www.stepstone.co.uk***
Totaljobs ***www.totaljobs.com***
TV Jobshop ***www.tv-jobshop.com***
Wide Eyes ***www.wideyes.com***
Yelcom ***www.yelcom.com***

KIDS NEW ENTRY

MONKEY MAKES SURFING SAFE

Kids-only channel SurfMonkey (***kids.surfmonkey.com***) is launching a complete, safe Web browser designed for children. The browser, available at ***www. surfmonkey.com***, comes in seven languages and includes a cyber host (that would be the monkey, then), email, 3D chat rooms, bulletin boards, instant messenger and videophone. And, thanks to a top-notch filtering system and firewalls, parents will be able to control what their child views. 'We have a responsibility to open up the very best of [the Net] to our kids, in the safest possible way,' says SurfMonkey's CEO, Charles Hart.

The browser was being fine-tuned at the time of writing, but parents are encouraged to read more at ***www.surfmonkey.com***.

<KIDS>

0-8

Babynames.com
www.babynames.com
Babyzone ***www.babyzone.com***
Cartoon Network
www.cartoonnetwork.co.uk
CITV ***www.citv.co.uk***
Diggit ***www.diggit.co.uk***
Fox Kids ***www.foxkids.co.uk***
FunSchool ***www.funschool.com***
Kidscom ***www.kidscom.com/orakc/Mousers/mouse.html***
Mother & Baby Magazine
www.motherandbaby.co.uk
Nickelodeon ***www.nickjr.com***
Sesame Street
www.sesamestreet.com/preschool

8 plus

AJ Kids ***www.ajkids.com***
Anything!Student
www.anythingstudent.com
Atkidz.com ***www.atkidz.com***
BJ Pinchbeck Homework Helper
www.bjpinchbeck.com
ChildU ***www.childu.com***
Club-Z ***www.club-z.com***
Disney.co.uk ***www.disney.co.uk***
EduWeb ***www.eduweb.co.uk***
Family Education
www.familyeducation.com
The History Channel
www.historystudystop.co.uk
MatMice ***www.matmice.com***
Pupiline.net ***www.pupiline.net***
S-Cool! ***www.s-cool.co.uk***
StudentUK ***www.studentuk.com***
Teen Advice ***www.teenadvice.net***
Teen Scene ***www.teen-scene.com***
Thunk ***www.thunk.com***
Wizziwiz.co.uk ***www.wizziwiz.co.uk***
Yahooligans ***www.yahooligans.com***

<LAW>

Cyberlawyer
cyberlawyer.city2000.com
Desktop Lawyer
www.desktoplawyer.freeserve.net
Divorce Online
www.divorce-online.co.uk
Law Assure ***www.lawassure.co.uk***
Law Rights ***www.lawright.co.uk***
Law Solutions ***www.lawsolutions.co.uk***
Legaldocs ***www.legaldocs.com***
UK Law Online
www.leeds.ac.uk/law/hamlyn

<MAGAZINES>

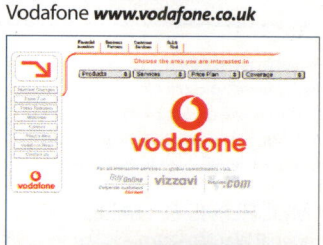
Online mags

Foocha ***www.foocha.com***
Garbled Communications UK
www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Show/1322
Salon.com ***www.salon.com***
Seven ***www.sevenmag.com***
Slate ***www.slate.com***
Suck ***www.suck.com***

<MOBILES>

Top Networks

BT Cellnet ***www.btcellnet.net***
One 2 One ***www.one2one.co.uk***
Orange ***www.orange.co.uk***
Virgin ***www.virginmobile.com***
Vodafone ***www.vodafone.co.uk***



Vodafone: a site for your mobie

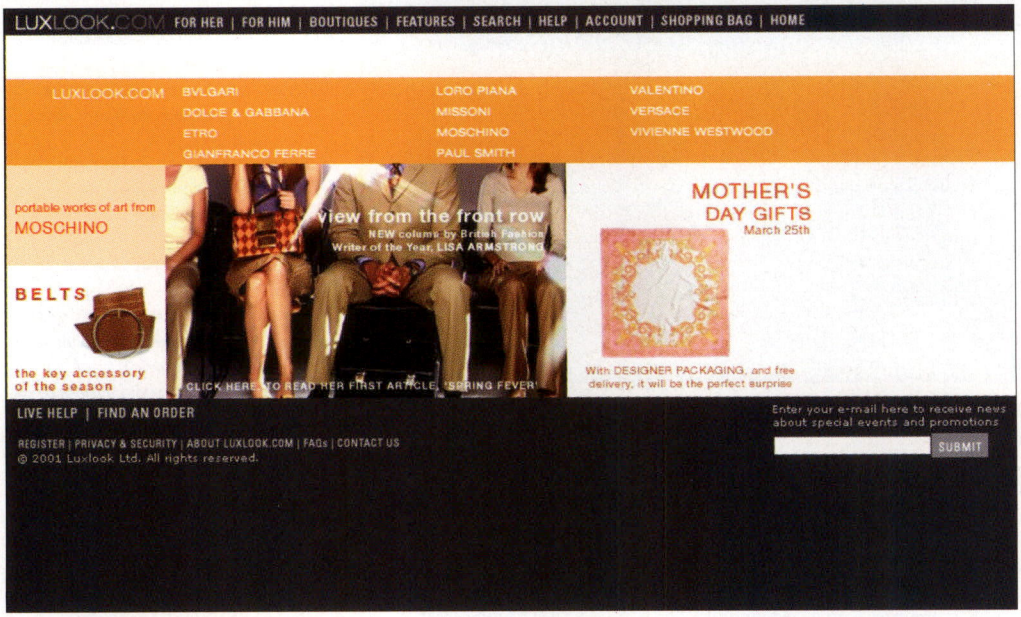
Ringtones & Logos

a2bwap ***www.a2bwap.com***
Be Mobile ***www.yellphone.com***
Jippii! ***www.jippii.co.uk***
MonsterMob ***www.monstermob.com***
Ringtones Online
www.ringtones.co.uk
tones4fones ***www.tones4fones.com***
YourMobile ***www.yourmobile.com***

<MOTORING>

Car manufacturers

Audi ***www.audi.co.uk***
BMW ***www.bmw.co.uk***
Citroen ***www.citroen.co.uk***
Ferrari ***www.ferrari.it***
Fiat ***www.fiat.co.uk***
Ford ***www.ford.co.uk***
Honda ***www.honda.co.uk***
Jaguar ***www.jaguarcars.com***
Lotus ***www.lotuscars.co.uk***
Mazda ***www.mazda.co.uk***
Mercedes-Benz
www.mercedes-benz.co.uk
Nissan ***www.nissan-europe.com***
Peugeot ***www.peugeot.co.uk*** »



SHOPPING NEW ENTRY

SURFING WITH STYLE

Fashion fans will go gaga over Luxlook.com, which has recently been redesigned just in time for the Spring/Summer season. Featuring top booty from the likes of Bvlgari, Dolce & Gabbana, Paul Smith, Versace and Vivienne Westwood, users will easily empty their bank balances with just a few wonderful clicks.

Choosing goods is a cakewalk; simply scroll through and click on the item you want. Images can be enlarged for viewing pleasure and for some items, such as handbags, users can rotate images this way and that to ensure it's *exactly* what they want.

And if fashion's really your bag, you'll enjoy the articles by *The Times*' fashion editor, Lisa Armstrong. Just voted Fashion Writer of the Year at the British Fashion Awards, the gal obviously knows her style do's and don'ts. When we visited, Lisa was casting her expertise over this spring's must-have items. If you find yourself inspired by Armstrong's words, you'll be pleased to know that the items she praises are ready for you to click on in the right-hand column. ***www.luxlook.com***

Porsche ***www.porsche.co.uk***
Rover ***www.rover.co.uk***
Toyota ***www.toyota.co.uk***
Volkswagen ***www.volkswagen.co.uk***
Volvo ***www.volvocars.volvo.co.uk***

<MUSEUMS & GALLERIES>

Imperial War Museum
www.iwm.org.uk
National Gallery
www.nationalgallery.org.uk
Natural History Museum
www.nhm.ac.uk
Tate Gallery ***www.tate.org.uk***

<MUSIC>

Artists, DJs & radio

The Beatles
www.thebeatleswebsite.com
Blur ***www.blur.co.uk***
David Bowie ***www.davidbowie.com***
Coldplay ***www.coldplay.com***
Fatboy Slim ***www.normancook.cjb.net***
Gilles Peterson ***gpwww.iscool.net***
Kylie Minogue ***www.kylie.com***
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REM ***www.remhq.com***
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www.stereophonics.co.uk
Vdance ***www.vdance.co.uk***
WOD1.com ***www.wod1.com***

MP3

BeSonic ***www.besonic.com***
Brand New Music
www.brandnewmusic.com
Clickmusic ***www.clickmusic.co.uk***
Crunch ***www.crunch.co.uk***
Getsigned.com ***www.get-signed.com***
Mp3.com ***www.mp3.com***
Popwire ***www.popwire.com***
Vitaminic ***www.vitaminic.co.uk***

Online mixing

DJSounds.com ***www.djsounds.com***
eJay ***www.ejay.com***
Getoutthere ***www.getoutthere.bt.com***
Hitsquad ***www.hitsquad.com***
Mouse Jam ***www.mousejam.com***
Online DJ ***www.onlinedj.com***
Scratch It ***www.turntable.de***
SS7X7 ***www.ss7x7.com***
Turntables ***www.turntables.de***

<NEWS>

Newspapers

Daily Telegraph ***www.telegraph.co.uk***
Guardian Unlimited
www.guardian.co.uk
The Independent
www.independent.co.uk
MegaStar ***www.megastar.co.uk***
The Mirror ***www.mirror.co.uk***
News Of The World
www.notw.co.uk
Scotsman ***www.thescotsman.co.uk***
The Sun ***www.thesun.co.uk***
The Times ***www.the-times.co.uk***

News services

ABC News ***www.abcnews.go.com***
BBC ***news.bbc.co.uk***
CNN ***www.cnn.co.uk***
ITN ***www.itn.co.uk***
NewsNow ***www.newsnow.co.uk***
PA News ***www.pa.press.net***
Reuters ***www.reuters.com/news***

<PEOPLE FINDERS>

Email addresses

Bigfoot ***bigfoot.com***
EmailFinder ***www.emailfinder.com***
Friends Reunited
www.friendsreunited.co.uk
People Site ***www.peoplesite.com***
WhoWhere ***www.whowhere.com***
Yahoo ***people.yahoo.com***

Phone numbers

BT Directory Enquiries
www.bt.co.uk/phonenetuk
Thomson Directories
www.thomweb.co.uk
Yellow Pages ***www.yell.co.uk***

<SCIENCE>

News & updates

BBC Science ***news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/sci/tech/default.htm***
einstein.tv ***www.einstein.tv***
Eureka Alert ***www.eurekalert.org***
NASA ***science.nasa.gov***
New Scientist
www.newscientist.com
WhyFiles ***whyfiles.news.wisc.edu***

<SEARCH ENGINES>

AltaVista ***www.altavista.digital.com***
Ask Jeeves ***www.askjeeves.com***
Dogpile ***www.dogpile.com***
Electric Library ***www.elibrary.com***
FAST ***alltheweb.com***
Google ***www.google.com***
HotBot ***www.hotbot.com***
Inter-Change ***www.inter-change.com***
Lycos ***www.lycos.com***
MetaCrawler ***www.metacrawler.com***
Mirago ***www.mirago.co.uk***
Northern Light ***www.nlsearch.com***

<SHOPPING>

Online auctions

Auction Hunter
www.auctionhunter.com
Auction Universe
www.auctionuniverse.co.uk
Bid4sport ***www.bid4sport.co.uk***
eBay ***www.ebay.co.uk***
eBid ***www.ebid.co.uk***
eSwap ***www.eswap.co.uk***
Eurobid ***www.eurobid.com***
Last Minute ***www.lastminute.com***
QXL ***www.qxl.com***
What Am I Bid? ***www.whatamibid.com***

Shopping directories

Best of British ***www.bestofbritish.com***
BritishShopping.com
www.british-shopping.com
Centreshop ***www.centreshop.com***
CleverPants ***www.cleverpants.com***
Coppernob Shopping.com
www.coppernobshopping.com
Cotswold Essential Outdoor
www.cotswold-outdoor.com
Crocus ***www.crocus.co.uk***

eDirectory ***www.edirectory.co.uk***
The Gift Delivery Company
www.giftdeliveryco.com
Glasses-On-The-Web.Com
www.glasses-on-the-web.com
IMRG ***shops.imrg.org***
Inshop.co.uk ***www.inshop.co.uk***
Internet Shopping
www.internetshopping.com
Island Trading
www.island-trading.com
myTaxi ***www.mytaxi.co.uk***
ShopGuide ***www.shopguide.co.uk***
Shoppers Universe
shoppersuniverse.com
Shopping Superstore
www.shoppingsuperstore.co.uk
Shopping UK
www.internetics.co.uk/shop
ShopSmart ***www.shopsmart.com***
Shops On The Net ***www.sotn.com***
Shop Spy ***www.shopspy.co.uk***
Shop Tour UK ***www.shoptour.co.uk***
Splendour.com ***www.splendour.com***

TopUKWebsites
www.topukwebsites.com
Shopping Zone ***ukshoppingzone.co.uk***
Virgin Net ***www.virgin.net/shopping***
Virtual Mall ***www.thevirtualmall.co.uk***
ValueMad ***www.valuemad.com***
Wedding List ***www.wedding.co.uk***

<SOCIETY & FASHION>
Main sites
BeautyLink ***www.beautylink.com***
BetterPlanet
www.care4free.net/greenlife
Boxfresh ***www.boxfresh.co.uk***
Cosmopolitan ***www.cosmomag.com***
Defining Edge ***www.definingedge.com***
Fotango ***www.fotango.com***
Fashion And Beauty Internet Association ***www.fbia.com***
Fashionfile ***www.fashionfile.com***
Fashion Mall ***www.fashionmall.com***
FashionNet ***www.fashion.net***
Lifebyte ***www.lifebyte.com***
Models.com ***www.models.com***
TheRumour ***www.therumour.com***
Salonweb ***www.salonweb.com***
Style Experts ***www.stylexperts.com***
Vogue ***www.vogue.com***
WooWho ***www.woowho.co.uk***

<SPORT>
FA Premiership clubs
Arsenal ***www.arsenal.co.uk***
Aston Villa ***www.astonvilla-fc.co.uk***
Bradford City
www.bradfordcityfc.co.uk
Charlton Athletic
www.charlton-athletic.co.uk
Chelsea ***www.chelseafc.co.uk***
Coventry City ***www.ccfc.co.uk***
Derby County ***www.dcfc.co.uk***
Everton ***www.evertonfc.com***
Ipswich Town ***www.itfc.co.uk***
Leeds United ***www.lufc.co.uk***
Leicester City ***www.lcfc.co.uk***
Liverpool ***www.liverpoolfc.net***
Manchester City ***www.mcfc.co.uk***
Manchester United
www.manutd.com
Middlesbrough ***www.mfc.co.uk***
Newcastle United ***www.nufc.co.uk***
Southampton
www.saintsfc.co.uk/index.htm
Sunderland ***www.sunderland-afc.com***
Tottenham Hotspur ***www.spurs.co.uk***
West Ham Utd ***www.whufc.co.uk***

Sport A-Z
Athletics ***www.nuff-respect.co.uk***
Autosport ***www.autosport.com***
Cricket ***www.cricket4.com***
Cycling ***www.cycleweb.co.uk***
Fishing ***www.anglersnet.co.uk***
Football ***www.football365.com***
Formula One ***www.itv-f1.com***
Golf ***www.golfweb.com***
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Martial Arts
www.martial-arts-network.com
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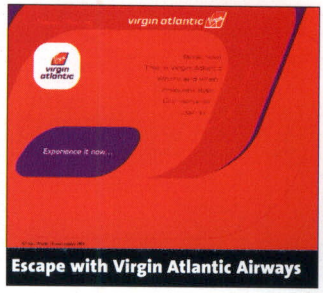
Motorbike Racing
www.motograndprix.com
Racing ***www.racingpost.co.uk***
Rugby League ***www.rleague.com***
Rugby Union ***www.scrum.com***
Snooker ***www.snookernet.com***
Tennis ***www.tennis.com***
Wrestling ***www.wwf.com***

<TELEVISION>
Top shows
Big Breakfast
bigbreakfast.channel4.com
Brookside ***www.brookie.com***
EastEnders ***www.bbc.co.uk/eastenders***
Friends ***friends.warnerbros.com***
Hollyoaks ***www.hollyoaks.com***
Neighbours ***www.neighbours.com***
Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?
www.phone-a-friend.com

TV companies
BBC ***www.bbc.co.uk***
Channel Four ***www.channel4.co.uk***
Channel Five ***www.channel5.co.uk***
E4 ***www.e4.com***
ITV ***www.itv.co.uk***
ONdigital ***www.ondigital.co.uk***
Sky ***www.sky.co.uk***

<TRAVEL>
Airlines
Air Canada ***www.aircanada.ca***
Air France ***www.airfrance.com***
American Airlines ***www.aa.com***
Britannia ***www.britanniaairways.com***
BA ***www.british-airways.com***
BM ***www.iflybritishmidland.com***
Buzz ***www.buzzaway.com***
Continental
www.flycontinental.com
easyJet ***www.easyjet.com***
Go ***www.go-fly.com***
Iberia ***www.iberia.com***
KLM ***www.klmuk.com***
Lufthansa ***www.lufthansa.com***
Qantas ***www.qantas.com.au***
Ryanair.com ***www.ryanair.com***



United Airlines ***www.ual.com***
Virgin Atlantic Airways
www.virgin-atlantic.co.uk

Destination guides
Amsterdam ***www.channels.nl***
Australia ***australia-online.com***
Bargainholidays
www.bargainholidays.com
Caribbean ***www.caribbean-travel.com***
Caribbean Islands
www.gopelican.com
Cheaperholidays
www.cheaperholidays.com
France ***www.franceway.com***
Germany ***www.germany-tourism.de***
Greece ***www.gogreece.com***
India ***www.indiagov.org***
Italy ***www.travel.it***
Ireland ***www.12travel.co.uk***
Japan ***www.jnto.go.jp***
Scottish Tourist Board Web site
www.visitscotland.com
Spain ***www.red2000.com***
UK ***www.exploreukland.co.uk***
US ***www.go-unitedstates.com***

Ferries
Ferry Savers ***www.ferrysavers.co.uk***
P&O ***www.poef.com/poef/index.htm***
Travel Britain ***www.travelbritain.com/UKPassengerFerries.html***
Travel.World ***www.travel.world.co.uk/ferries.htm***
UK Camp Site ***ukcampsite.co.uk***

Rail travel
Euro Railways ***www.eurorailways.com***
Great Eastern Railway ***www.ger.co.uk***
Great Western Trains
www.great-western-trains.co.uk
Railtrack ***www.railtrack.co.uk***
Scotrail ***www.scotrail.co.uk***
UK Public Transport ***www.pti.org.uk***
Virgin Trains ***www.virgintrains.co.uk***

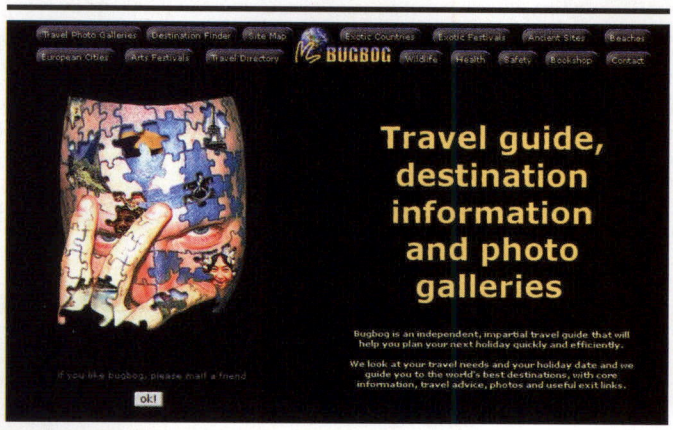
Travel agents
Airtickets ***www.airtickets.co.uk***
Bargain Holidays
www.bargainholidays.org
Biztravel ***www.biztravel.com***
ebookers ***www.ebookers.com***
Expedia ***www.expedia.co.uk***
First Resort ***www.thefirstresort.com***
Holiday Deals ***www.holidaydeals.com***
Holiday Wizard
www.holidaywizard.co.uk
Internet Travel ***www.itsnet.co.uk***
Last Minute ***www.lastminute.com***
STA Travel ***www.statravel.co.uk***
Thomas Cook ***www.thomascook.co.uk***
Thomson ***www.thomson-holidays.com***
Trailfinders ***www.trailfinder.com***
Travel Choice ***www.travelchoice.co.uk***
Usit Campus ***www.usitcampus.co.uk***

<WEBCAMS>
Directories
Allcam ***www.allcam.com***
Camcity ***www.camcity.com***
Digital Camera ***www.dcn.com***
FlyOnTheWall.com
www.flyonthewall.com
Webcam Central
www.camcentral.com
WebCam World
www.webcamworld.com
Webviews ***www.camvista.co.uk***

Our Favourites
AfriCam ***www.africam.com***
Howletts Zoo ***howletts.net***
Jennicam ***www.jennicam.org***
Ultimate Taxi ***www.ultimatetaxi.com***
WalfordCam ***www.bbc.co.uk/eastenders/webcam/index.shtml***

<WEB CENSORS>
Cybersnoop ***www.pearlsw.com***
Cyber Patrol ***www.cyberpatrol.com***
Net Nanny ***www.netnanny.com***
Xcheck ***www.xcheck.net***

<WEB DIRECTORIES>
About.com ***www.about.com***
4anything ***www.4anything.com***
AOL Netfind ***www.aol.com/netfind***
Excite ***www.excite.com***
Infoseek ***infoseek.go.com***
Liszt (mailing lists) ***www.liszt.com***
LookSmart ***www.looksmart.com***
Open Directory ***www.dmoz.org***
Thomson ***www.thomweb.co.uk***
WebCrawler ***www.webcrawler.com***
Yahoo! ***www.yahoo.com***
Yell ***www.yell.co.uk***



TRAVEL NEW ENTRY

THE TRUTH ABOUT TRAVELLING

If you've not booked your holiday yet, now is the time to do it (otherwise there will be no holiday time left to take). And if you're feeling totally uninspired in the destination department, check out Bugbog's site. Rather than waste time touting flights and package tours, Bugbog offers impartial worldwide travel information to help potential holiday-makers choose a break that suits them.

We were impressed by the photo gallery, which covers such far-flung destinations as Yemen and, er, Bournemouth. No smooth glossies here, just honest photos of beautiful places.

The perfect place to surf before you fly.
www.bugbog.co.uk

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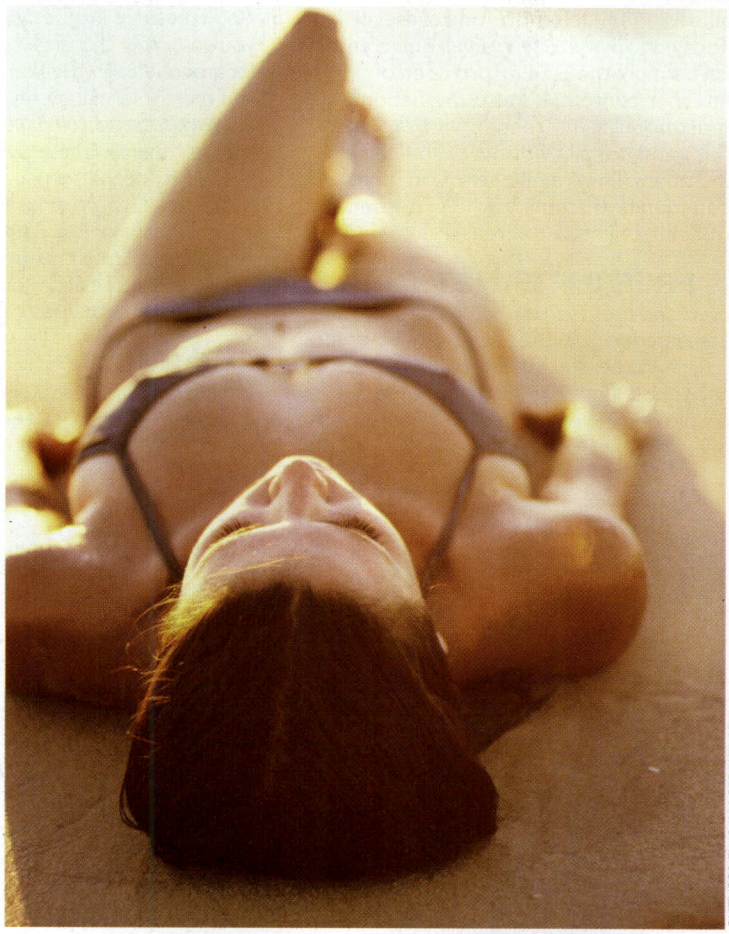
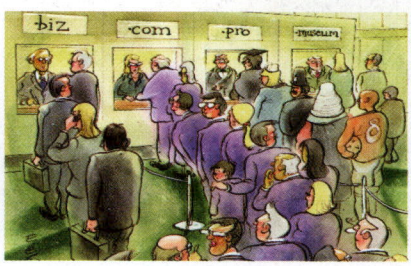


PICTURES: ELLIS, IMAGEBANK, RETNA



16 PAGES TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU USE THE WEB
NO. 1 FOR THE INTERNET

What you'll get from Freeserve

With a range of essential services and 18 channels packed with great content, Freeserve will change the way you use the Web

Welcome to Freeserve, the UK's No. 1 for the Internet. Whatever you want from the Internet, you can get it from Freeserve. We offer the very best content, covering all the topics you might want to read about. Whether you're into sport, travel, shopping or business, or you want to chat to others online, you'll find all this and much more on Freeserve Today, at *www.freeserve.com*. But Freeserve isn't simply the leading provider of Internet content. It's also the nation's most popular Internet service provider (ISP) and portal, with over 2 million members. They're all part of one big community that enjoys the many benefits of being online with Freeserve.

FREE INTERNET CALLS

Everyone uses the Internet in different ways. Some people use it regularly at work or at college; others spend their evenings browsing at home; still more will log on for just a couple of minutes every day. At Freeserve we offer you a choice of great-value ways to access the Internet, putting you in control of your charges. Freeserve AnyTime allows you free Internet calls at any time of day for just £12.99 a month. Then there's Freeserve HomeTime, which gives BT users unmetered access from 6pm until 8am during the week and all day at weekends – you simply pay a flat monthly fee on top of your BT phone bill. And Freeserve No Ties just lets you pay as you go, simply charging you the price of a local phone call while you're online. You can find more information on all these packages at *www.freeserve.com/time*.

Finally, there's FreeservePlus, the new high-speed Broadband service for both homes and businesses. FreeservePlus for home works on a flat-fee basis of just £39.99 a month, plus a one-off installation charge of £150. For more details and information for businesses, see *www.freeserve.com/plus*.

EMAIL

Imagine what it must be like to receive post at any time of the day or night, within seconds of when it was sent. Well, that's exactly how email works. And with Freeserve, you don't have to pay a penny. Messages are free to send and receive – all you pay is the cost of the Internet connection call.

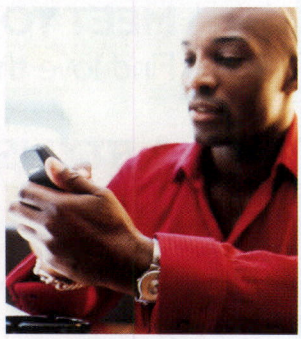
And now you have even more choice. Thanks to FSmail, our Web-based email service, you can check your Freeserve email from anywhere in the world – all you need is an Internet terminal. For more information, see *www.fsmail.net*.

MOBILE INTERNET

Because email is sent to and from computers, there's always the worry that you're missing vital messages whenever you're away from your PC. But now that needn't be a problem. If you have a mobile Internet phone (also called a WAP phone), you can use it to read parts of the Internet, including your Freeserve email. Which means you can read all your messages and stay up to date with the news and sports results, wherever you are. Find out more at *www.freeserve.com/mobile*

TALKING EMAIL

If you don't have a mobile Internet phone, you can still access your emails when you're away from your computer – by using Speechmail. This clever service reads your email messages to you over your mobile or wired phone using a special electronic voice. And as you would expect, there's no subscription charge for Freeserve members.



To use the service, simply sign up at the address below. You'll be given a personal phone number which you can ring to access your email. So no matter how important the message, you won't need to be at your computer screen to receive it.
www.freeserve.com/communications

YOUR OWN WEB SPACE

Once you've started looking around the Internet, chances are you'll be keen to build your own site. Well, now that's easy, thanks to some great benefits you'll receive as a Freeserve member.

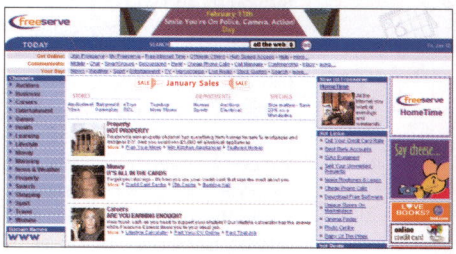
We'll give you a massive 15 megabytes of free space in which to create your own site. You can make your site about absolutely anything you want – your favourite pop star, football team or even yourself! The free software on the Freeserve installation CD,

All the family will enjoy Freeserve

which you use to sign up as a member, makes it easy to get your site up and running. With the help of Freeserve, you'll soon be at home on the Internet.

THE BEST CONTENT

As well as free Web space, unlimited free emails and a choice of Internet access packages, we're also dedicated to bringing you the very best content on the Internet and collecting it all under one roof, on the Freeserve Today page at ***www.freeserve.com***.



To make the most of Today, make it your homepage on the Web and check it every day to get a digest of all the latest news, weather and sport. You can even customise the Today page to suit your personal interests and then explore events more thoroughly on the relevant channels – there are 18 of them to choose from!

FREESERVE FOR EVERY PART OF YOUR LIFE

Freeserve has a channel to suit every part of your life. Try the feature-packed Lifestyle channel, follow the stars with Entertainment, plan a holiday with Travel or buy your CDs, books and much more on Shopping. If you

have a small business, you'll want to keep up with the Business channel. There are also channels on Sport, Learning and Money, as well as the Women's channel at icircle.com.

Finally, our email newsletter will keep you up to date with everything that's going on at Freeserve. It's all at ***www.freeserve.com***.

Sign up online at www.freeserve.com or pick up the Freeserve installation CD at Dixons, Currys, PC World or The Link. It's free.

A-Z CHANNEL GUIDE

WITH 18 CHANNELS TO CHOOSE FROM, THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Auctions

Bid online for almost any item imaginable!

Business

Whether you've got an established business or you've just started out, Clearlybusiness.com, backed by both Freeserve and Barclays, can offer you support and advice. They can help you get your business online, too.

Careers

You're wired, now get hired, not fired! The Careers channel lets you search databases of 70,000 jobs nationwide. You can apply online to jobs you want, or submit your CV and wait for employers in your area to come to you!

Chat

The new, improved chat service is a great hit. You can use our 3D chat rooms to get around and explore virtual worlds, set up your own chat groups, even talk to the stars with our new celebrity chat section.

Entertainment

All the latest film, music and television news can be found on Freeserve Entertainment. This is also where to buy CDs, books, DVDs and concert tickets online. And now you can listen to the radio over the Web as well!

Games

Find reviews, cheating tips, gameplay and a virtual shop.

Health

The Freeserve Health channel will help you stay in tip-top condition, with information and advice on everything from the latest medical breakthroughs to alternative medicine.

Learning

From primary school right through to A-level and beyond, Freeserve Learning can help you and your family through your studies with its stimulating interactive learning environment.

Lifestyle

The Lifestyle channel is an exclusive features magazine which brings you the latest on everything that matters for the way you live your life, online and off. Lifestyle has something for everyone.

Money

Keep your finances healthy with expert advice from the Money channel. Whether you want savings tips, a mortgage, or advice on choosing an ISA, you can keep your pocket full with Freeserve.

Motoring

Get on the road with the Freeserve Motoring channel, your one-stop shop for all your motoring needs. From insurance to breaking motoring news and reviews of the latest car models, you'll find it all on Motoring.

News and Weather

Get tomorrow's papers today with this superb news service. Read the national and international news as it happens, plus business, entertainment and sports news, and the weather.

Property

From finding the right mortgage to sorting the decorators from the cowboys, on Freeserve Property you'll find everything you'll need to move into a new home.

Search

Use Search to find anything you could want on the Internet. As well as facilities to search all the Web, you can search more specifically for businesses and services, domain names and items on the Auctions channel.

Shopping

At the Freeserve Shopping channel you can find a huge range of items, from flowers or food to a CD or a computer. Look out for great deals and savings from SHOP@freeserve and the new marketplace retailers.

Sport

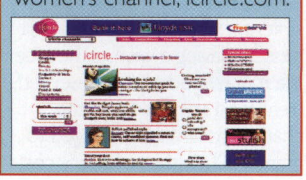
Football, rugby, tennis, cricket, motorsport, golf – the list goes on. Whatever your sport, you'll find it on Freeserve. Get the latest results and follow your heros on the Freeserve Sports channel.

Travel

Visit the Travel channel for instant access to a database of 70,000 flights and holidays worldwide. There are always sensational last-minute deals, plus weekend breaks and car hire – everything for the perfect holiday!

Women

Web women need look no further than the Freeserve women's channel, icircle.com.



PICTURES: IMAGE BANK, P.A.

No time like the present

Chat online to friends and family in real-time, with the Freeserve Messenger service

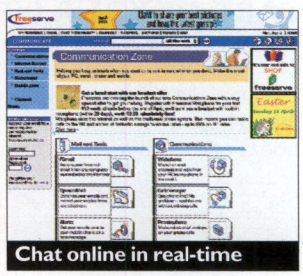
Anyone who uses email will know what fun it is to send messages to friends and family anywhere in the world and receive a reply in minutes. And because emails are sent via the Internet, they cost only the price of a local call, making them far cheaper than a phone call or even a stamp. But even emails can require a bit of patience, as they usually take a few minutes to arrive after they've been sent. A sort of instantaneous equivalent, however, is Freeserve Messenger. Like Internet Chat, Freeserve Messenger makes your message viewable by the recipient the instant you send it. This way, you can have an online one-on-one chat in real-time to anyone else who has also registered and downloaded the special free software needed to use the service.

Registering and downloading Freeserve Messenger to your PC takes just a few minutes. When you register, you'll be asked – amongst a few other details – to name your interests, such as cinema, the Internet, music, sport or games. These will go into your member profile along with your personal Freeserve Messenger number and may be viewed by all other Freeserve Messenger users. This means that anyone who sees your profile and thinks they'll get on with you can send you a message if they'd like to chat. As part of the Freeserve Messenger community, you can see other users' profiles, too, which makes the service a great way of making new friends. But if you don't want strangers to contact you, you can always modify your profile facility so that they don't have access to your details or your Messenger number. Then it's up to you to find new people to chat to; or perhaps you'll just choose to chat to existing friends who have Freeserve Messenger.

Chat online to your friends – and make new ones

When you and your friends and family join Freeserve Messenger, you can add each other to the Friends list. Then, whenever any of you are online, a window will pop up to tell you so, and you can start sending each other messages! And if your computer has a sound card, a microphone and speakers or a headset, you can even voice-chat online. It's just like being on the telephone, but because Freeserve Messenger works through the Internet, it only costs the price of a local call, wherever in the world you're messaging to. Freeserve Messenger can even operate behind a firewall, which means it can be used by businesses.

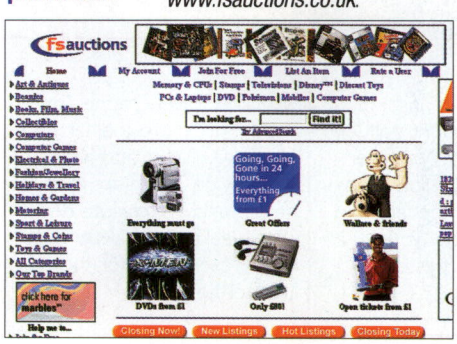
To get chatting with Freeserve Messenger or to find out more about the service, go to *www.freeserve.com/communications*.



Chat online in real-time

Celebrity auction for charity

FSauctions, the Freeserve Auctions channel, has teamed up with Bedek and the children's charity Make-A-Wish Foundation to auction framed pillowcases signed by top celebrities. Over 20 famous stars, including actor Ewan McGregor and heart-throb pop singer Craig David, have taken part. The Make-A-Wish Foundation was started in 1986 specifically to grant the wishes of children aged 3 to 18 suffering from life-threatening illnesses. Having a wish come true is a much needed and deserved treat for a sick child, and the charity has already managed to grant 1800 wishes of every cost and complexity across the UK. Other celebrities taking part include S Club 7, Suggs, Hear'Say and Chelsea Football Team, and some have even created their own pillowcase designs. The series of auctions, which is called 'Sweet Dreams', will be taking place between 11-21 May. Anyone can bid in them. All you need to do to take part is go to *www.fsauctions.co.uk*.



Bid for a celebrity pillowcase

Your snaps on the Web

When you come back from holiday this summer, don't hide your snaps away in a photo album. Instead, post them on the Internet so your friends can enjoy them, wherever they are. With Kodak PhotoNet on Freeserve, you don't even need a digital camera to do it. Simply take your camera film to a participating retailer and ask them to tick the Kodak PhotoNet box when they take the rest of your details. As well as being processed into prints, your photos will be uploaded on the Web so you can email them to friends; you'll receive a special card or an email telling you where to find them. To find out more about this and other services at Kodak PhotoNet, see *www.freeserve.com/photo*.

Show everyone your photos

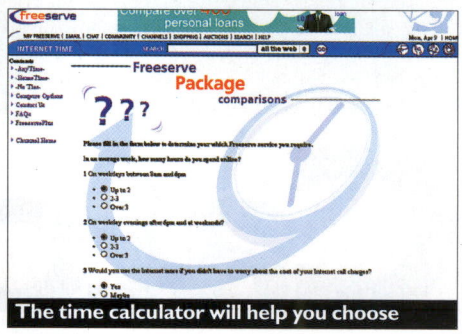
There's no need to watch the clock with Freeserve packages

We can work it out

Use the Freeserve Time calculator to find the call package for you

Because different people use the Internet in different ways, Freeserve offers four packages to make sure that you don't pay any more than you need to. With AnyTime and HomeTime, calls to the Internet are completely free; you just pay to access the Internet. AnyTime costs just £12.99 a month to access the Internet at any time of day, any day of the week; with HomeTime you pay £8.99 for offpeak access in the week and at any time throughout the whole weekend. Or you can just pay as you go, with No Ties. Once you've paid the one-off £150 installation fee for Freeserve Plus, you pay a monthly fee of £39.99 for an Internet connection which is up to 10 times as fast as ordinary access and which you can use at any time of the day or night. Freeserve Plus is also separate from your phone line, which means you can stay online all the time and still receive all your phone calls and faxes.

Having a choice is great, but then you have the problem of deciding which package is best for you. That can be hard if you've never actually noticed how much you use the Internet. So if you're not sure which package to choose, let the new interactive Time calculator at *www.freeserve.com/time* work it out for you. The Time calculator will ask you a number of simple questions about your Internet use, such as how many hours a week you use the Internet, and at what time of day, and whether you would use the Internet more if you weren't worrying about the cost. The Time calculator will then use your answers to work out which package is the most economical for you, whether that's AnyTime, HomeTime, No Ties or Freeserve Plus. If you're happy with its choice, you simply click straight through to register to the package it has chosen for you. It couldn't be easier. So don't waste time worrying about which great Freeserve time package to use; let the Time calculator pick the right one for you and you can start using the Internet straight away. To use the Time calculator or to find out more about any of the Freeserve call packages, go to *www.freeserve.com/time*.



The time calculator will help you choose

NEWS IN BRIEF

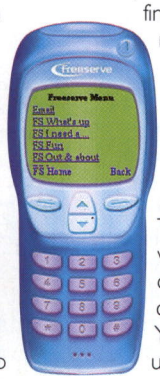
JUNE 2001 BROADBAND, WAP, EXAM REVISION

DON'T HANG AROUND

Frustrated by slow Internet access? Well, you don't have to put up with it any longer. With Freeserve Plus, the new broadband Internet service from Freeserve, you can have high-speed access in as little as two weeks after ordering. Freeserve Plus is 10 times faster than ordinary Internet access. And because it's so fast, you can enjoy live video and audio streaming without any interruption and download even large files in a fraction of the time it takes with an ordinary connection. Freeserve Plus is separate from your phone line, which means you can surf the Web while leaving your BT line completely free for phone calls and faxes. And because you pay a single monthly fee of just £39.99, you can stay connected to the Internet 24 hours a day. To order Freeserve Plus or to find out more, go straight to *www.freeserve.com/plus*.

GET MORE FROM YOUR WAP PHONE

WAP phones might give you access to parts of the Internet, but if you need to visit different sites for different information it can be quite a long-winded process. Fortunately, the Freeserve WAP portal provide lots of handy content all in one place. Here you'll find all the latest news, sports results and secure online shopping, plus search facilites for services and hotels. There's a whole range of channels to choose from. You can also use your WAP phone to read and send emails from your Freeserve email account. To try our WAP simulator (pictured), get your mobile connected to the Internet or to find out more about what Freeserve has for WAP phone users, go to *www.freeserve.com/mobile*.



EXAM HELP IS AT HAND

Exams are always nerve-wracking, whether you're taking them yourself or watching family members prep for them. Fortunately, Freeserve Learning is on hand to give this year's exam students the chance of even better results, thanks to its free online revision resources. Freeserve Learning makes full use of the Internet, providing interactive diagrams and sound features including listen-and-learn modern language practice. There are also randomly generated tests providing literally billions of questions. Learning covers the core subjects for SATS, GCSEs and A-levels and is ideal for help with homework as well as exam revision and to reinforce classroom learning. Get all the help you need from *www.freeserve.learning*.

PICTURES: IMAGE BANK, RETNA

GET YOUR SHOPPING DONE ONLINE

Shop online to make sure you don't miss a second of summer

Catch it while you can

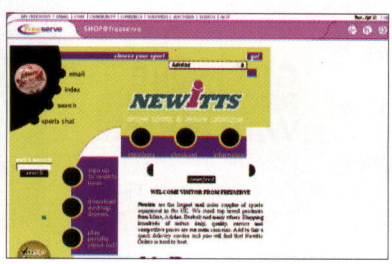
Spend summer in the sun, not the shops. Find everything you need in minutes online

Summer comes but once a year, and in the UK it doesn't last very long, either. There's a lot to cram into a few weeks of sunshine and warm weather: the chance to play footie in the sun as well as traditional summer sports like cricket and tennis; there are barbecues to be had, beers to be drunk, gardens to tame, DIY to catch up with and summer fashions to flaunt. With so much to do, you won't want to spend your summer-time in the shops buying the things you need to make the most of it. Which is why shopping online really comes into its own in the summer. By shopping online, you can get everything you need without leaving home, and with Freeserve Shopping (*www.freeserve.com/shopping*) it's even quicker. Like a virtual shopping mall, Freeserve gathers all the shops you could possibly need under one virtual roof.

SPORTSWEAR

Probably one of the first purchases you'll want to make this summer is some new sports kit. For one thing, when you're chasing around after a football in the park under the beating sun, you won't want to be in your winter tracksuit – even if you've managed to wash out last season's smells. What you'll need is a fresh pair of loose shorts to let the summer air circulate and a new shirt to help show off your muscles and your deepening tan. And if you play tennis or cricket, now is a good time to get in a professional mood by replacing last year's grey and exhausted tennis shoes, renewing your whites or splashing out on a killer racket. You can get all of these, as well as gear for just about any other sport, from the Sports and Leisure area on Shopping (*www.freeserve.com/shopping/leisure*). Stores like Newitts and 9feet offer a

Freeserve Shopping has all your sports gear



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huge range of all types of sportswear and equipment. Golf fanatics can find absolutely everything they could wish for at Proshop and GOLF.co.uk, which both offer superb customer services such as several weeks' trial on all golf clubs. Elsewhere you can save money as well as time with a selection of special offers on items such as tennis rackets, cricket shoes and even a trampoline – a great way to keep the kids entertained throughout the summer, particularly if you like to enjoy sport from the shady calm of your sitting room… And if your idea of being sporty is modelling top-label sports leisure wear, there's plenty available for you, too.

BARBECUES

Whether you've worked up an appetite exercising your sporting talents or you just like the excuse for great food, hot weather and blue skies always call for a barbecue. Have a look at Homebase in Homes and Gardens (*www.freeserve.com/homes*) and you'll find everything you'll need for delicious outdoor cooking and a relaxed, party atmosphere. For that traditional taste there's a range of charcoal barbecues to choose from, whether you want a smart, standing fixture for the garden or, minimum fuss, a disposable kit – perfect for a couple of chargrilled steaks for two on a summer evening. And to make sure the temperature stays summery even after the sun goes down, pick up a patio heater at the same time.

GARDENING

You've got your barbecue and your heater, but what will your guests think of your garden? If you like your house to be smart when you have guests round for a party indoors, you'll want your garden to be just as attractive when you have friends over for a barbecue. You might simply need to smarten up the lawn with a bit of grass seed, or brighten up the flower beds with one of Greenfingers' plant collections, and if you need any gardening tips George the virtual gardener is on hand to help. Homebase has an impressive selection of gardening equipment, from hand forks to petrol rotary lawnmowers, and lots of inspirational ideas to help you make your garden the envy of your guests. There's plenty of garden furniture to choose from too, and McCord also has a selection of striking garden ornaments. And to add some extra entertainment to your party, it has perfect summer games like croquet and a giant version of Jenga – particularly good fun after a few beers!

DIY

On overcast days this summer, make the most of the dry, warm weather by doing all those DIY chores which are so unappealing in winter. This is the opportunity to touch up external paintwork, fill up any cracks in your masonry or repoint the brickwork. And with fewer showers threatening to interrupt you, you can also get on with all those indoor jobs which are made so much easier if you're able to spread out and work in the garden. You won't be the only one catching up with these chores, so avoid the traffic and the hassle of finding a place to park at your local DIY superstore by ordering everything you need online. You'll find an amazing 26,801 different tools at DIYTools, and at Homebase all your paints, papers, fillers, glues, rawl plugs, bits and bobs – you name it! Homebase also has DIY advice and tips for novices and experts alike, as well as lots of great ideas on how to improve your home, such as how to stain duckboard or make a designer screen on a budget. Put the finishing touch to your hard work with some well coordinated posters from Easyart or an original picture by a leading young artist from Britart.com.

Keep your cool: shop for the latest fashions with an ice tea in your hand

Find everything for the garden with a few clicks of your mouse

FASHION

Getting a new summer wardrobe can be exhausting in the summer heat if you try and do it on the highstreet, so to keep your cool while you pick up the latest fashions, go straight to Freeserve Shopping with an ice tea in your hand. Shopping has all the classic fashion outlets available at the click of a mouse. Debenhams has a large selection of designer fashion for men and women, and at Zoom Fashion you'll find the latest looks from Burton Menswear, Hawkeshead, Racing Green, Top Man, Top Shop and Dorothy Perkins. Luxlook brings you clothes and accessories from top designer labels including Dolce & Gabbana, Moschino, Paul Smith, Versace and Vivienne Westwood. You'll be able to find summer footwear, too, and everything you'll need to attract attention on the beach.

TRAVEL

Of course, what comes immediately to mind when you think of summer is having a holiday. Whether you decide to stay on home soil or get out of the country for a week or two, you can organise the whole thing in minutes with Freeserve Travel (*www.freeserve.com/travel*). Book a flight or hotel almost anywhere in the world through well-loved agents like Thomas Cook or ebookers, and if the weather starts looking dodgy over here, you can always make a dash for a last-minute deal. Find out whether to expect rain or shine here or abroad by checking the forecast on the Freeserve News and Weather channel.

Shopping has everything you'll need this summer, and with hundreds of exclusive sales and discounts on every kind of product, shopping with Freeserve will save you money as well as time. Don't waste the summer traipsing up and down the high street; get your shopping done in minutes by going to *www.freeseve.com/shopping* and spend your summer basking in the sun instead.

SAVE YOUR TIME FOR THE SUN

Shop for summer in minutes

SPORTSWEAR
Summer shorts, tennis rackets, cricket whites …

BARBECUES
A taste of the sun

GARDENING
Set the scene for outdoor fun

DIY
Make hay while the sun shines

FASHION
Get kitted out with the latest look

TRAVEL
Get away – particularly if it looks like rain

PICTURES: KOBAL COLLECTION

Someone to

Don't sit around waiting for romance to come to you; go out and get it online with Freeserve

Everyone deserves romance, whether they get compared to Claudia Schiffer or bear more than a passing resemblance to Les Dawson pulling one of his notorious faces. If you haven't found them already, Miss or Mr Right is probably out there waiting to meet you right now. But as many single people will say, the real problem is knowing exactly how to find a partner. The crazy pace of modern life often leaves little time for relaxing, let alone making new friends; and if you're a bit shy, meeting new people can be a challenge in itself.

Whether the obstacle between you and a relationship is lack of opportunity or confidence, with the brand new Dating area on the Freeserve Lifestyle channel (at *www.freeserve.com/lifestyle*), you have as good a chance as anyone of finding a partner. It's completely free to join, to enter an advertisement about yourself and to search the Webdating database for compatible partners. You only pay if you decide to get in touch with someone – in which case you'll probably be only too pleased!

The biggest benefit of a dating service is that you can get an idea of what someone's like before you make contact with them. By reading their advertisement about themselves and the kind of person they're looking to meet, you can find out a few facts about them and get an impression of their personality. When you visit Webdating you will be asked to fill in a search profile form so that you can be given a basic match with compatible members. The form includes information such as your sexual persuasion, the age range of the person you'd like to meet, whether you mind if they smoke and which area you'd like them to live in. Don't worry, only Webdating will see this information – it simply enables the site to find you the kind of person you want. You don't have to be a member to search the database, but if you're not you'll have to re-enter this data every time you want to search it, so it's a good idea to join anyway – especially since it's free.

As a member, you'll also get to place an advertisement about yourself so that others will have the chance to find you. You have about 65 words to tell people about your personality and your interests, and perhaps a basic description of your physique. To make the most of this space, don't waste too much of it describing the colour of your eyes, the shape of your features or the style of your hair.

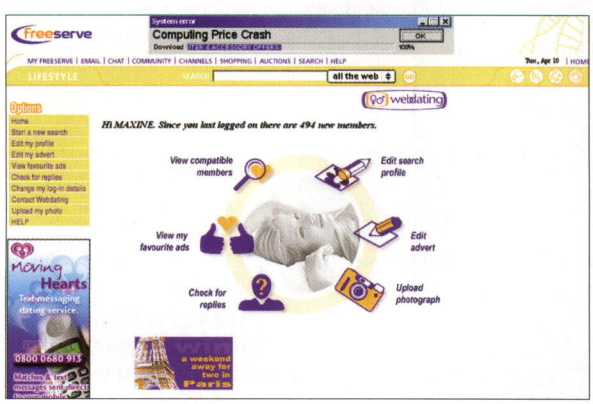
Members who upload a photo are eight times more likely to get a response

Instead, you can get all of this information across by uploading a photo of yourself. Make sure it's a recent photo, though; you'll appreicate just how important this is if you heard about the Englishman who travelled to the US to meet a woman he fell in love with online, only to find out that her photo was 30 years old!

The fact is, members who upload a photo with their advertisement are eight times more likely to get a response. And by using a photo to show other members what you look like, you can use the space in your advertisement to tell them what kind of person you are. Obviously, it's impossible to describe yourself completely in just a few words, but even if you simply write about what you like doing in your spare time, what your ideal holiday is or what kind of music you enjoy, it can tell someone quite a lot about you. Try not to give a dry list of all your best attributes; you're likely to give a better idea of your actual personality if you express yourself in a few well-chosen phrases. And remember, first impressions are important, so even if you're feeling a bit miserable and lonely at the moment, bear in mind that that's just your current state of mind, not your personality when you're happy. Focus on describing the kind of person you are when you're content – because if you find the right partner, that's what you'll be!

In addition to uploading a photo of yourself, another way of dramatically increasing your chances of receiving a response is by leaving a

There's someone for everyone at Freeserve Dating



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click with

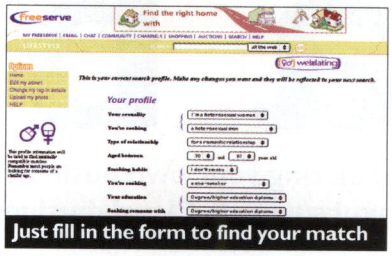
Find love online with Freeserve

free voice message. When you submit your advertisement, you will receive an email with your membership ID and the telephone number to call to leave your message. Simply follow the step-by-step instructions and wait for the responses to start coming in!

'anonymous' because it won't show your personal email address; it's all delivered via Webdating. This means your privacy is protected, so if you change your mind about someone, you have the freedom to end all contact. To respond with the software you can either pay as you go, which costs 50 pence per minute, or you can become a full member and pay a subscription so that you can check your replies and respond to prospective partners as often as you like, at no extra cost. You can subscribe for three months for £29.95, six months for £39.95 or a year for £59.95.

Be prepared to meet several members before you find someone you click with

If you receive responses to your advertisement or you decide you're interested in one of the compatible partners the service finds for you, you might decide to get in touch with them. You can do this by quickly downloading a piece of special software which allows you to send the person an 'anonymous' email. It's

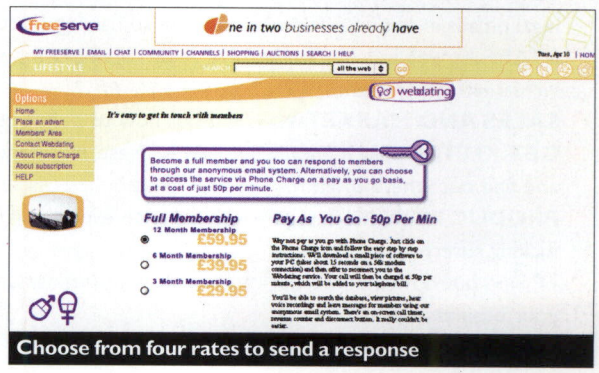


Just fill in the form to find your match

Hopefully it won't take as long as a year for you to meet someone you like, but be patient. Remember, you may be lucky enough to have discovered Webdating, but it may be, say, another six months before your future partner does. And don't be disappointed if you don't get the right kind of response straight away; stick at it. Alternatively, try rewriting your advertisement or broadening the criteria in your search profile – perhaps you wouldn't mind that much if you were introduced to people in a wider age group, or if they smoked. With a little bit of luck, you'll soon find someone that you'd like to meet. When you do, remember to follow some obvious safety rules when meeting strangers: meet in a public place, tell a friend where you're going and what time you expect to be back.

Of course, not everyone you meet will be the successful candidate. Perhaps you'll meet up with several members before you find someone you really click with. But meeting them in the first place is a definitely a step in the right direction. So don't waste any more time: join Freeserve Dating and you could soon find the perfect romance!

www.freeseve.com/lifestyle



Choose from four rates to send a response

PICTURES: IMAGE BANK

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www.freeserve.com

Make a break

Starting your own business is hard work, but can pay big dividends if you succeed. Clearlybusiness has everything you need to get started

For anyone fed up with answering their boss's demands and watching them reap most of the rewards, the idea of starting up your own business can be very appealing. You may be taking your life into your own hands, but you'll have independence, control, and, if you're lucky, substantial profits made all the more satisfying for being the result of all your own work. Imagine it for a second. Tempting, isn't it?

You're not alone. Going solo is very popular, with 600,000 businesses starting up each year in the UK. On average it takes 13 weeks and £18,000 to set up a business in the UK, but that's just a part of it: you'll also need inspiration, business acumen and the willingness to put in sheer hard work before you can even think about starting to trade. Financial, technical and marketing expertise are also crucial.

With the right qualities, planning research and guidance, you have every chance of achieving success. Whether you're still thinking about going it alone with your business idea or you've made that decision and need advice about making it happen, the new Start Up guide from Clearlybusiness (*www.clearlybusiness.com/startup*) provides the information and tools you'll need. The step-by-step process will take you through the thinking and testing stage as well as the practicalities and the legalities of setting up your own business, and equip you for those first few months.

> **The idea of starting up on your own can be very appealing**

Fancy yourself as an entrepeneur? First get plenty of advice from Clearlybusiness

WILL YOUR IDEA WORK?

Whatever your resources, your business idea will only succeed if it's completely sound in the first place. Ask yourself, at the end of the day, will you make enough profit to live off – to pay your mortgage, finance living expenses for

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Turning your idea into reality

Check out the Clearlybusiness ten-step guide to building a business. For more information, tools and advice, visit *www.clearlybusiness.com/startup*

- **COMPANY FORMATION** Check out the pros and cons of the different types of company status before you register yours
- **BUSINESS PREMISES** Consider your options when setting up your own business premises, be it at home or in another building
- **RAISING FUNDS AND BANKING** Work out how to raise the cash for your new business, and how to take care of it
- **ACCOUNTING AND TAX** Know your tax obligations, and how to find the right accountant for your business
- **LEGAL MATTERS** Find out how to choose and use a solicitor, and clue up on the common legal pitfalls in business. Clearlybusiness also has legal documents you can download
- **STAFF** As well as a comprehensive guide to employing, we make your life simpler with our virtual HR department
- **SALES AND MARKETING** Find out how to build your brand and get your marketing right
- **GET KITTED OUT** Should you buy or lease office equipment? Decide what's best for you and find out where to go for the best deals
- **PRODUCTION** Make sure you're clear on everything from how to get the best suppliers to making sure you get a holiday
- **IT** Find out how the Internet can benefit your business, and how to identify the technology your business needs

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you and your family, and give yourself a holiday? The most obvious thing to consider is whether there is actually a market for your product or service. How many people actually want a musical doormat? And if you're planning on providing something similar to another local business, such as a painting and decorating service, what can you offer that will persuade customers to come to you rather than your competitor? Start off by doing the Clearlybusiness SWOT test to identify your Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats to find out if your idea stands up. Then test it out on friends or potential customers; make sure they give you an honest opinion!

Then you need to come up with a reliable business and project plan that shows on paper exactly how your business is going to work. Keep it simple, but use it to clarify what you need to do, when you need to do it and how you're going to keep your business on track. You'll certainly need a sound business plan if you want to convince your bank or another party to lend you money when you start out, but your plan will also provide you yourself with a useful guide to follow. Clearlybusiness

With the right qualities and guidance, you have every chance of success

Start Up has several articles to help you do this. Start with 'How to write a winning business plan'; 'Analyse your business idea's chance of success' provides more advice and a useful check list. Having a sustainable business model before you start means you can avoid drastic and costly changes later on, as well as disappointment or even doom for your business.

DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT SKILLS?

If your business is going to succeed, you'll need certain key skills, particularly marketing, financial, technical and managerial skills. For instance, do you know what kind of image or logo will give your business the most impact, or how to get your new business known? Would you know how to fix a broken A-drive on a computer, or a failed Internet connection? If not, you'll need either to acquire these skills yourself or find other people who have them. Clearlybusiness has advice on finding and working with professionals with these skills. There's even a ten-step guide to dealing with financial problems yourself.

HAVE YOU GOT WHAT IT TAKES?

You've got a sound business plan and all the resources you need, but ultimately the deciding factor for your business's success is you. Do you have what it takes to go it alone? Are you prepared to sacrifice the security of a monthly wage for the uncertainty and stress of finding your own customers and persuading them to pay for the products or services you've created?

You'll need to think hard, too, about whether you can cope with the change in lifestyle that your new business will demand at first. For the first year at least, your hours will probably be long and hard. You'll have less time for friends and family, and for yourself. Even if you work from home, you'll need to be sure you're disciplined enough to separate your working and personal life. The article 'Setting up a home office' will help you with this, and to deal with other issues that working for yourself can raise. For example, if you've come from a large office environment, will you find it difficult to work in isolation?

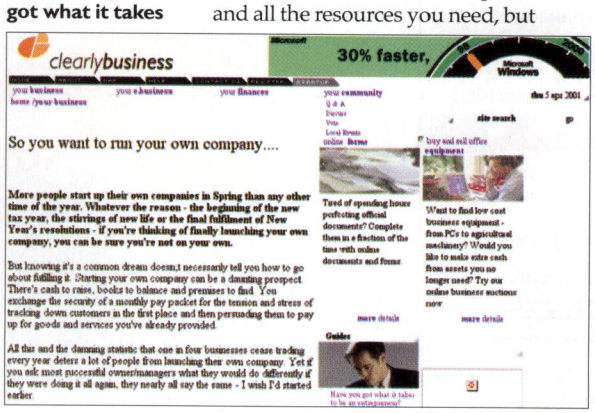
Finally, you'll need to be absolutely certain that you'll cope with taking full responsibility for making all your business decisions on your own. Even if you have staff working for you, people will still turn to you for the final word.

And remember, really successful entrepeneurs need imagination, determination and resilience. You'll need to be able to think constantly of ways to get more and more customers, have the strength to make sure they work and the courage to cope with knockbacks.

GOING FOR LAUNCH

If you're confident you're made of the right stuff, and your business plan is viable, you can start going about raising the funds to get your business on its feet. Clearlybusiness has plenty of advice on how to do this, from approaching your bank manager to finding an investor. And once you're up and running, Clearlybusiness will tell you what you need to do to make your business grow. Whatever stage you're at with starting a new business, Clearlybusiness will give you the advice, tools and process you'll need to succeed. Full information is available at *www.clearlybusiness.com/startup*. But for your starter for ten, see our Making It Happen guide opposite. Clearlybusiness: it's not business as usual.

Find out if you've got what it takes



PICTURES: IMAGE BANK

A perfect wedding

Getting married this summer? Make sure it all goes smoothly, and you look great

Your wedding should be one of the best days of your life. With any luck you'll only have one, so you'll want it to be absolutely perfect. But weddings can take such an enormous amount of organisation that by the time you get to the big day you risk being completely worn out with the endless stress and family arguments, and almost wishing it was all over and done with! But it doesn't have to be like that.

The Freeserve women's channel, icircle (*www.icircle.com*), has a brilliant new solution to pre-wedding stress: an interactive wedding planner that can be used by the bride, groom or parents to make sure that nothing is forgotten and everything goes smoothly on your special day. You'll find the wedding planner in the Getting Married area of Sex and Relationships on icircle. Simply log on, select the list of tasks still to be done and then sit back and wait for the Wedding Planner to email you when it's time to action each one.

You can even add your own choice of tasks to the list; perhaps you've relatives coming from a foreign country who need special accommodation arranged, or you've decided to have a clown to entertain children during the reception but need to be reminded to make the booking. When remembering so many tasks is harder than actually doing them, you'll find that being prompted to decide on your honeymoon travel outfit or have your order of ceremony printed makes all the difference when you're trying to plan your wedding.

Organising your wedding can be as fun as the day itself, with Freeserve

Also in Getting Married you'll find expert advice on who should pay for what and how to plan the wedding itself and the reception. If you fancy getting married abroad, read through our guide to choosing the right tour operator or organising the whole thing yourself; you'll need to know what questions to ask, what wedding clothes to choose and which countries will demand blood tests or specific periods of residency before you tie the knot on their shores.

Have a personal makeover

Also in Getting Married you'll find expert advice on who should pay for what and how to plan the wedding itself and the reception. If you fancy getting married abroad, read through our guide to choosing the right tour operator or organising the whole thing yourself; you'll need to know what questions to ask, what wedding clothes to choose and which countries will demand blood tests or specific periods of residency before you tie the knot on their shores.

icircle has a brilliant new solution to pre-wedding stress

For brides-to-be who want a final farewell to their lives as single ladies, there are great ideas on how to have a really special hen weekend. If overdosing on cocktails or tearing off a stripper's G-string with your teeth doesn't really do it for you, why not consider an extended salsa session in Barcelona or a weekend of pampering at a health spa? If you want all of your wedding to be an experience you actually want to remember, choosing the right hen weekend can be as important as the big day itself!

A woman's wedding is probably the occasion where she'll want to look the most beautiful she ever has. Achieve a truly radiant look by taking time to visit the virtual makeover studio on icircle's Beauty channel. By uploading a photo of yourself or choosing a model with a similar face, you can find out which colours and tints bring out the best from your complexion and features. And throughout May, the icircle Beauty channel will be unveiling the latest treatments, techniques and products to revive skin after months in the British winter or in the airless

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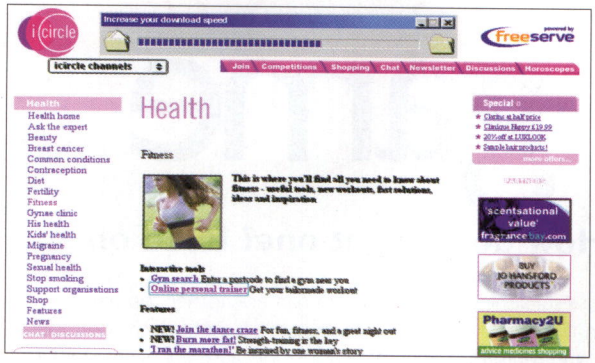


Get fit for your wedding or just your swimsuit

environment of the office. As the sun comes out for summer, you can find out the best ways to protect yourself from harmful UV rays and discover the self-tanning products to use for the most convincing results. And if you want to find a beauty salon near you, the Find a Salon tool will do it for you. It couldn't be easier to get yourself looking your best.

Whether you're worried about fitting into your wedding outfit or

With the 'Lose 10 lbs' plan you'll never go hungry

just your swimsuit this summer, on the icircle Health channel you'll find all the inspiration and advice you'll need to get into shape. icircle Health has a choice of healthy and delicious diets that will help you shed the pounds in weeks. With the fantastic 'Lose 10lbs' plan you'll never go hungry. You can even snack between meals and still lose weight. There's even a special version for vegetarians, so anyone can do it.

Then there's the brand new Summer Detox diet, perfect to make you feel fresh for summer and ideal if you need to recover from your stag or hen weekend before you go up the aisle. And if you're one of those people who thinks they can't stick to any diet, icircle even has the answer for you. Have a look at the article 'How to lose a stone without trying' to find out how making a few simple changes to your lifestyle will mean you'll never have to cut out the things you love.

Of course, getting into shape isn't just about healthy eating. Plenty of exercise will keep you trim and make you fit and well throughout your body. The warmer days and lighter evenings are perfect for outdoor activities, so this summer make it a priority to work out, particularly if you're nervous about the prospect of baring all on the beach. Start by logging on to the personal trainer tool on icircle Health. Do the quick quiz to find out how much training you need to do each week and what kind of exercise is best for you, and receive a personalised exercise programme. For example, if you just want to lose weight you'll need the Endurance and Fat Workout; if you really hate excerise and need a lot of motivating, the Activity-based Workout – walking to work instead of driving, for instance – is what you need.

There's a range of other fitness options on icircle Health, too. You'll find clear guides on everything from toning up in your local park to T'ae Bo, an invigorating combination of martial arts and aerobics – *Friends* actress Jennifer Aniston swears by it! And if you've been toying with the idea of joining a gym but seem, oddly, to be having terrible trouble finding one near you, don't worry: the Gym Search Tool will make sure there's no reason you have to go without (whatever your excuse). Simply type in your postcode to find the details of the gym nearest to your home or workplace. But before you part with your cash, make sure you take a few minutes to read the quick feature 'Choosing the right gym'.

So if you're getting married or just want to look stunning for summer, go to icircle at *www.icircle.com*.

Planning your wedding

If you think you might forget the following when you're organising your wedding, then you'll definitely need the icircle wedding planner

66 WEEKS TO GO
- Put an announcement in the paper
- Book the reception venue

39 WEEKS TO GO
- Start interviewing and comparing prices of potential photographers
- Decide what kind of music you want at the ceremony

26 WEEKS TO GO
- Choose patterns and fabric if you're having clothes made
- Request demo tapes from ceremony musicians

13 WEEKS TO GO
- Get vaccinations for honeymoon trip, if necessary
- Buy thank-you gifts for bridesmaids and any other wedding party members of your choice

4 WEEKS TO GO
- Chase up unanswered invitations
Decide on seating plan for the reception

1 WEEK TO GO
- Hold a rehearsal for the ceremony
- Pack for the honeymoon

1 DAY TO GO
- Iron your outfits
- Relax and pamper yourself!

DADS, IT'S YOUR BABY TOO

Get involved with your partner's pregnancy

There's no shortage of advice for women about what to expect when they get pregnant, but what about their partners? How can you get equally involved with your unborn children, so that you're just as elated as your partner when she gives birth? Well, now you can visit the special dad's section in icircle's award-winning parenting channel. Here you'll find everything you'll need to know about how to support your partner and develop a relationship with your child while he or she is in the womb. It's also the place to come if you have any worries of your own during the pregnancy, or any concerns about becoming a father. For example, you might be wondering what's going to happen to your love life during pregancy. Well, as icircle Babyworld reveals, some couples actually find it adds a whole new dimension! Then there's the birth itself. Many men worry that even though they'd like to be present to welcome their baby into the world, they may not be able to cope in the delivery room. Find out what other dads think by visiting one of the buzzing discussion boards. You'll also find up-to-date advice on parental leave and an insight into what antenatal classes involve. There's even a check list of what to pack in your labour kit. In fact, you'll find everything you need to know so that you can share fully in the experience that's going to change your life for ever. *www.icircle.com/babyworld*

PICTURES: IMAGE BANK

The name game

What are domain names? What are they for? How do you get one? Read on ...

Imagine a city with thousands of houses, shops and businesses, but where the buildings were known not by addresses, but by numbers in an apparently random order. Imagine how difficult it would be for anyone to find your home, or for letters and packages to be delivered; even the simple task of finding your way around would be a total nightmare.

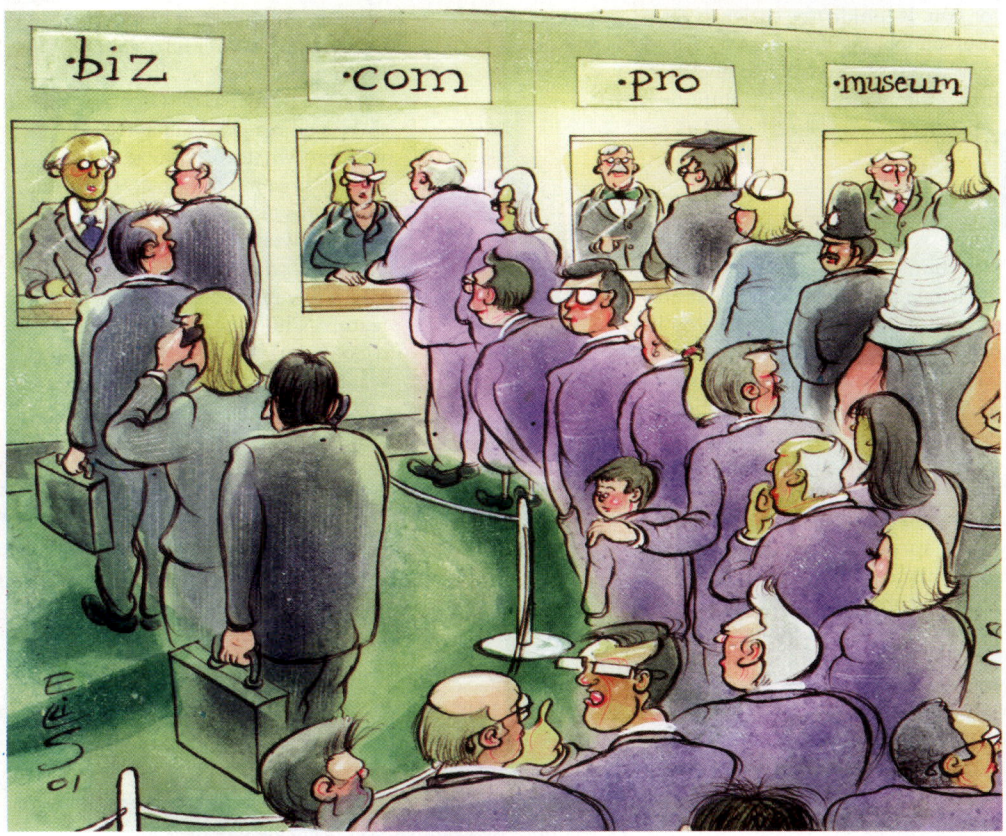
If it wasn't for domain names, this city would be the Internet. On the Web, the exact location of each page is actually attained through a series of numbers called the IP address. We all know how difficult it can be to remember all the digits in a telephone number in the right order, so having to remember all the configurations for Web site addresses would really make your mind boggle, especially if you were in a hurry. And even if you made a note of the number, if you keyed one digit in wrongly you'd end up in completely the wrong place!

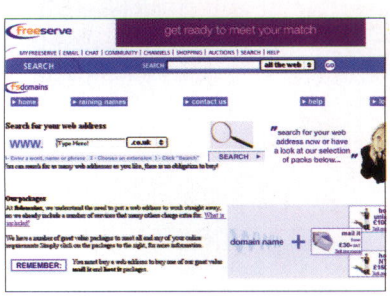
So to make life on the Internet a lot easier, domain names were introduced. Rather than having to keep a diary of the numbers of your favourite sites or having to refer to a massive directory of them, all you need to do is remember a domain name. The beauty of domain names is that they are designed to be as logical and memorable as possible. For instance, if you want to visit somewhere like the supermarket Sainsbury's on the Web, all you need to do is remember the domain name sainsburys.com. As a result, it takes just seconds to find the site you want.

Having a domain name is as important for traditional companies as it is for Web-based businesses. For dot com pioneers like lastminute.com or napster.com, registering a domain name was part and parcel of establishing their identity. But even if some traditional companies and retailers don't yet sell their products or services online, they won't be seen anywhere these days without their domain name as part of their overall image or brand. They pay a great deal of attention to their online presence because it helps them communicate with their customers, to direct them to the nearest store branch and to inform them of new products, promotions or shop openings. Companies also know that having an effective presence online is vital if they want to be seen as progressive or even cool and trendy.

As you may have noticed, not all domain names end in .com. It's is what's known as a top-level domain name. Although it traditionally refers to American companies, it is independent of geographic associations. So any Web site that wants to be seen as having a global, rather than just a national, presence chooses a .com domain name. Another top-level domain name is .net, which some people choose because it's even easier to associate with the Internet. However, for some companies it's important that their physical location is clearly present in their virtual address. They will choose to register the appropriate country-code domain name. For instance, a .gr domain names refers to a Greek Web site, a .il to a Web site based in Israel, and a .tv site to a company located on the island of Tuvalu – easy! Most international companies will register geographically-specific domain names in all the countries in which they have offices, shops or local sites. And if they're clever, international companies will register geographically-specific domain names even in countries where they don't have a presence, simply to be sure that no one can abuse their brand by using their name to direct unsuspecting visitors to competitive or pornographic sites in a bid to get as many hits as possible.

Soon there'll be a range of top-level domain names to choose from





Buying a domain name is quick and easy with FSDomains

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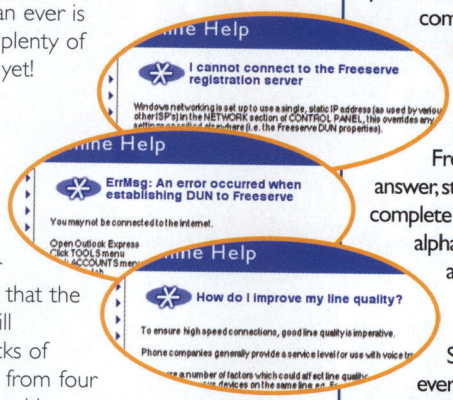
But dot com domain names are still the most popular, and so far a staggering 20 million have already been registered. Contrary to popular belief, however, dot coms are definitely not running out. In fact, it's estimated that 99.99 percent of all possible dot com domain names are still available. You may have heard sceptics talk about the impending end of the dot com era and bursting of the dot com bubble, but the fact that dot com registrations are currently rising faster than ever is ample evidence that there's plenty of life in the old domain name yet!

CLAIM YOUR NAME

What's more, registering a dot com, or any other kind of domain name, is easy. FSDomains (at *www.fsdomains.com*), can do it for you. First you need to check that the domain name you want is still available, then with a few clicks of your mouse you can choose from four different registration periods, with prices starting from just £49 for one year. There's also a range of special packages on offer, such as a facility that forwards to an email address with your new domain name all mail sent to your old email address; or a facility to host your Web site. Even if you don't have a Web site right now, FSDomains will register and keep your domain name safe for you so that when you're ready, it's all set up and ready to use. And should you have any trouble thinking of a domain name, Raining Names is on hand to offer suggestions based on your needs.

If the top-level domain name you want at the moment happens to be already taken by somebody else, don't despair! ICANN, the US organisation responsible for the management of domain names, recently decided to introduce seven new top-level domain names. These are .aero, .biz, .coop, .museum, .info, .pro and .name. They're not available quite yet, but when they are, these new domain names will help distinguish and identify different kinds of companies, such as businesses, museums and professions. This will make them a welcome addition to the existing domain names both because they will create more top-level names to choose from and because it will make it even easier to remember companies' addresses on the Web. So keep your eye on FSDomains and you could be one of the first to have one of the new domain names! For more information, see *www.fsdomains.com*.



www.freeserve.com/help

ONLINE HELP

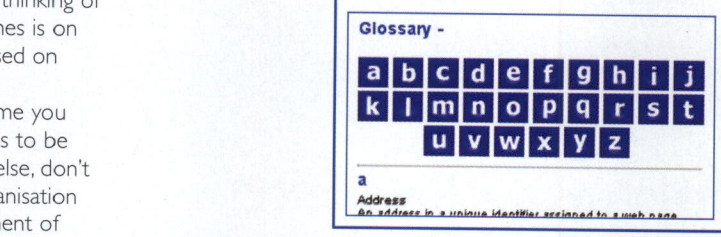
We've put together an awesome set of answers to all the technical queries that you might have. It's available on our Web site – and it's free!

WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

If you're new to the Internet, Freeserve is committed to making it as easy as possible for you to get online. We've designed the help section on the Freeserve Web site so you can turn to Freeserve and get a straight answer, straight away. There's a complete content guide, a full alphabetical index of topics and a Find function – all designed to take you straight to the answer you need. Separate sections deal with everything you need to know to avoid problems before set-up, and tell you what to expect as you begin to install the software from the CD-ROM onto your machine. It really is that simple!

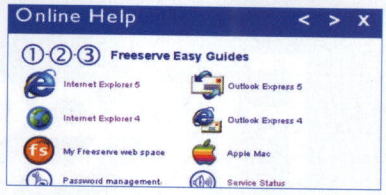
HOW DOES ONLINE HELP WORK?

It's easy! There are four main sources of information. Read through the descriptions below and you'll soon see which best suits the type of query you have. Then connect to Freeserve, visit the help section and get all your questions answered quickly.



THE GLOSSARY

If there's an Internet expression you don't understand, turn to our glossary first. It's more than likely to be there.



THE EASY GUIDES

If there's an area of your Net use that is causing you difficulty, turn to our Easy Guides for a complete solution. You'll find answers sorted by subject.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

If there's a specific question you need answered, turn to our Q&A section for rapid help. First select the general area from our drop-down menu, then a specific question. You may find your question has already been answered.

CONTACTS

If you still need help, you can email our support staff. They're the same people who staff our phone helpdesks, and they're trained to deal with your queries. Direct email addresses are listed on the contacts page. They'll be happy to help you!

HOW DO I FIND ANSWERS ON THE CD?

Alternatively, there's a fully comprehensive Help feature on the Freeserve start-up CD-ROM. When you put the CD in your machine you'll be given four options. The Help feature takes you to a comprehensive set of instructions to enable you to get online with Freeserve. *www.freeserve.com/search.*

PHONELINE HELP

Our experts are on call 24 hours a day

Using the Freeserve online help service couldn't be simpler, but from time to time you might have a direct question for one of our experts. To help you get the most out of your connection, the Freeserve Technical Support team is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Make sure you've consulted our online help before you call, as you may find we've already answered your question. If not, our trained staff can provide you with instant answers in plain English on a range of Internet subjects. Calls cost 50p per minute.

PC Support 0906 2517517; Apple Mac 0906 7234000

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PICTURES: PETE ELLIS

surf the Internet without watching the clock

Freeserve AnyTime just £12.99 per month

Freeserve leads the way in making the Internet an easier, freer place. And we're doing it again with Freeserve AnyTime.

From January, Freeserve AnyTime gives you Internet calls, anytime, day or night, for an incredible £12.99 per month. Freeserve AnyTime provides all the benefits of Freeserve's fun-packed, easy-to-use, free service without the worry of spiralling telephone bills. No one else can match it.

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Net help that's one step smarter

@ CHANNELS ://

> KEEP YOUR KIDS SAFE 100
You want your children to enjoy the Web – but you don't want the dangers that come with it. We round up software and advice to keep them safe

> OUR TOP 50 ISPS 106
The results of our latest lab tests of 200 UK providers, rated for speed, connectivity and reliability

> THE ISPs OF THE YEAR 108
It's difficult to sort the quality providers from the rest – but we've done just that in our comprehensive awards special

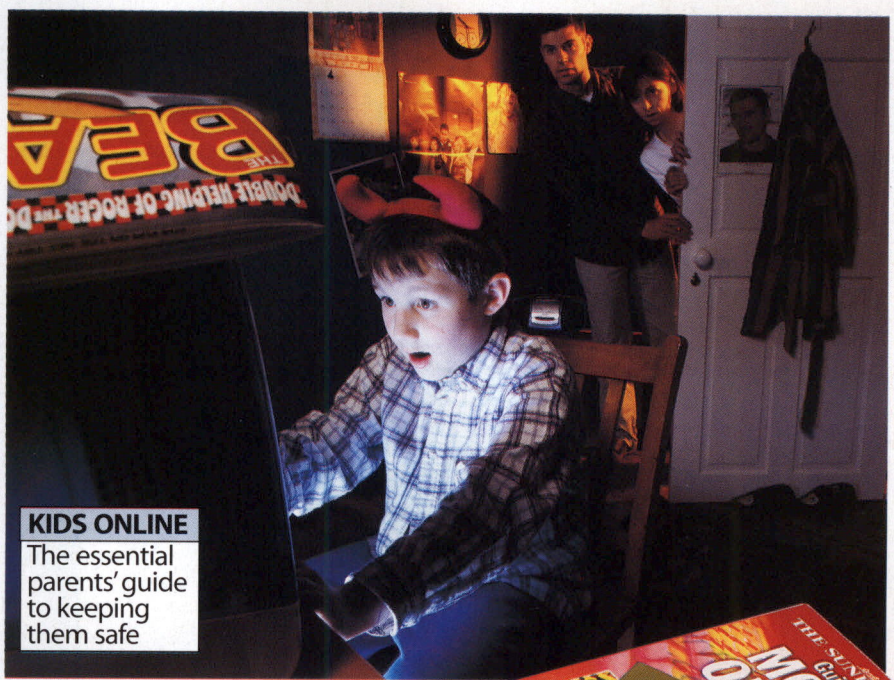
> GETTING STARTED 110
Ensure that you've covered all the bases with our back-to-basics guide to email, the Web, chat and newsgroups

> THE FUTURE IS HERE 116
The wireless Internet is about to get faster and flashier; we show you the kit you'll want before it hits the stores

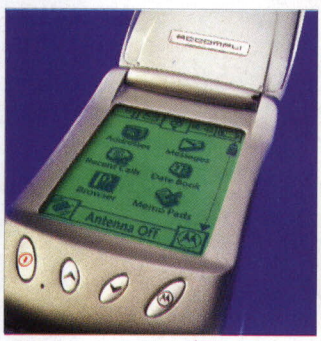
> TESTED BOOKS 120
Our round-up of the best Web help books on the market

> WEB DESIGN 122
How to encourage interaction with your users with feedback forms

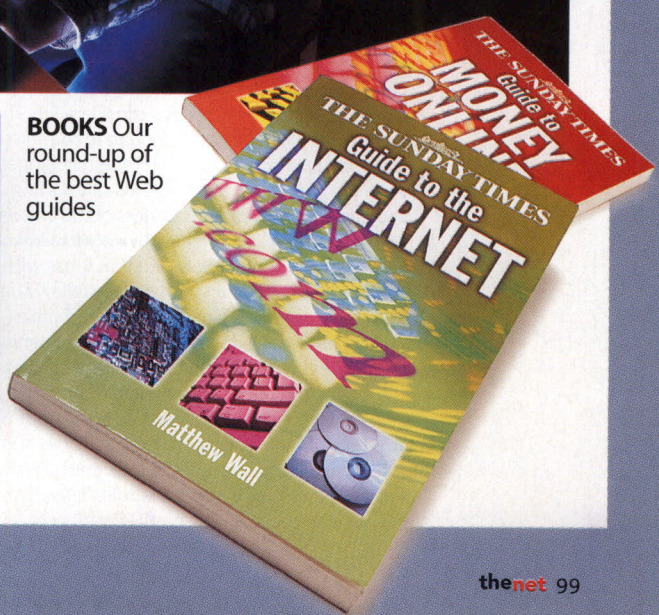
> Q&A 124
Your pressing problems, from ISPs to email, solved by our team of experts



KIDS ONLINE The essential parents' guide to keeping them safe



GPRS Is this the future?



BOOKS Our round-up of the best Web guides

Keep your kids safe online

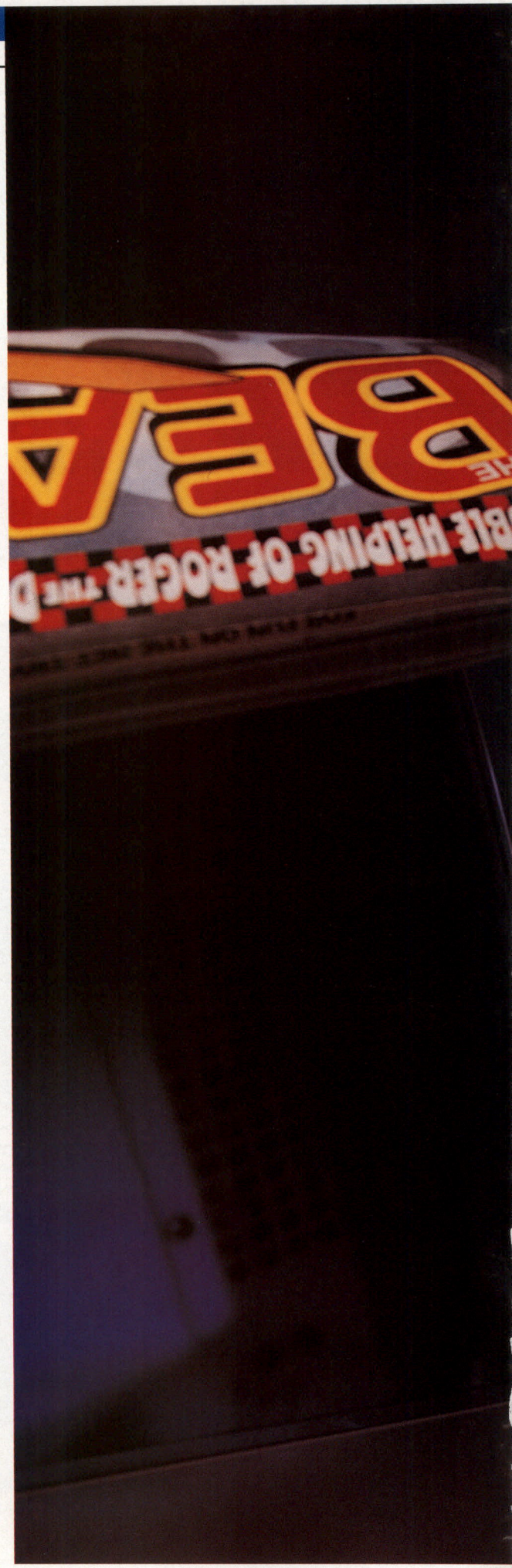
You want your children to enjoy the wonders of the Web – but you don't want them exposed to its seamier side. Here's how to strike a balance...

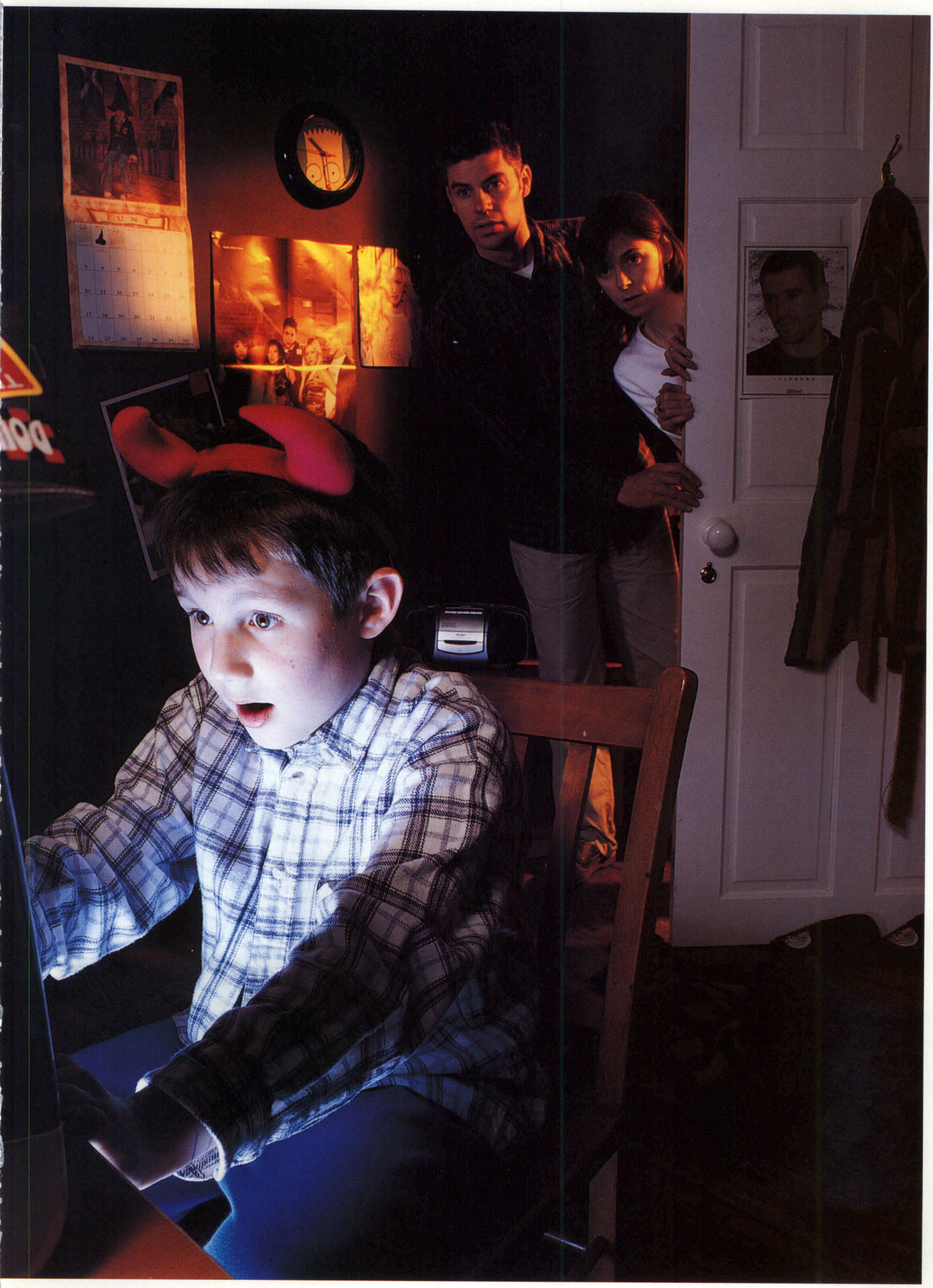
CURIOSITY IS SOMETHING ALL CHILDREN COME pre-programmed with and, as every parent knows, it's a double-edged sword. The Web illustrates this perfectly; the sheer volume of knowledge and interaction available online makes it a perfect place for kids to make friends, brush up on some extra learning or get help with their homework.

Unfortunately there's always a downside and, in the Web's case, it's the dangers presented to children who take a wrong turn on the information superhighway. It's all too easy to end up on a pornographic or other unsuitable site during a legitimate search; similarly, older kids' curiosities might persuade them to delve into murky waters if left unattended.

The worry for parents of wired children is that they might come across paedophiles online, particularly in chat rooms; as in the real world, the chances are minimal, but still worth serious consideration. The government was concerned enough to commission an official report on how to minimise the danger, which recommended teaching kids safe surfing at school and better police awareness of the problem. Teen girl portal Wicked Colours (***www.wickedcolours.co.uk***) was sufficiently concerned that it has withdrawn its chat service and others may follow suit.

Concern over news stories about paedophile activity online has led to a huge interest in nannying software and ways of monitoring where children visit. Obviously, supervising children during their every minute online isn't always an option, but there are plenty of ways to both monitor activities and put systems in place to prevent the little ones stumbling across anything you'd rather they didn't. Read on – and put your mind at rest.





BE VIGILANT

We're not here to preach about the amount of time that a kid should be spending sat in front of a computer, playing games or surfing the Internet. However, if you're at all concerned about what your kids actually get up to when they're online, then there are plenty of ways to monitor the situation.

Without doubt the only sure-fire way to find out what your kids are doing on the computer is to sit next to them when they're using it. This hands-on approach is one that some parents swear by, but it is obviously heavily dependant on the amount of time you have available. However, keeping the computer off-limits, unless you're around, means that you'll know precisely what they're up to. Lo-tech is often best.

Some parents we spoke to told us that while they didn't actively monitor what their kids were up to, they made sure the family computer was kept in a busy area, usually the sitting room. No kid's likely to start frequenting porno sites if Mum and Dad are sitting behind him on the sofa. Sometimes the mere threat of interruption is enough to dissuade inquisitive young minds from going where they shouldn't.

Some parents swear by sitting with children while they surf

TRAIL OF EVIDENCE

Everything you do on a computer leaves a trail. Quite often that trail is useful. You can, for instance, retrieve files you've accidentally deleted. And that same electronic trail is also very handy for tracking what your kids are getting up to. This is by no means an infallible way of tracking their computer use, but it can be a good starting point.

Firstly, have a look in that recycle bin. If they've forgotten to 'empty' the bin then you might find some evidence of what they've been up to. Even if they have emptied the bin you can still find out what was in there by using a program like Norton Undelete, which will list all recently removed files. This can make for interesting reading.

All Web browsers have both a cache (all the files that make up a Web page, such as images and the HTML code itself) and a history (a list of all sites visited), both of which you can check. On a PC you'll find the cache in the Windows> Temporary Internet Files directory.

GUIDELINES FOR CHAT ROOMS

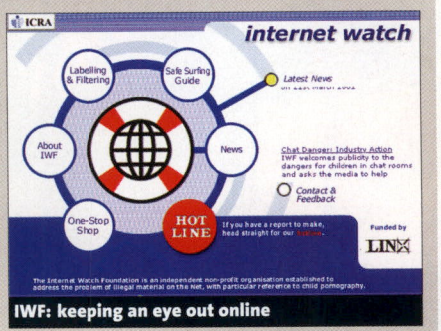
SAFER CHATTING»

The Internet Watch Foundation (***www.iwf.org.uk***) recently published a report on measures to minimise the dangers to children in Internet chat. The report said that, while cases to date were very low in proportion to the rapidly growing rate of Internet use, there was a risk that chat could be abused by a criminal minority to make contact with children with a view to developing a sexual relationship with them in the 'real world'. Among the report's suggestions were the following recommendations:

1 Education programmes should be aimed at parents and other carers to advise them of the potential risks of chat services and appropriate steps to take to protect kids.

2 Internet Service Providers (ISPs) should provide clear advice to their subscribers about child-friendly chat, and actively promote chat services specifically targeted at their age range.

3 Children's chat rooms should be supervised ('moderated') and a user-friendly reporting mechanism should be available for users to report incidents for investigation.



IWF: keeping an eye out online

EYE SPY

The report also suggested a series of safety messages, called the Net Smart Rules, that parents and carers could pass on to children. These included.

1 Don't give out personal details, photographs, or any other information that could be used to identify you.

2 Don't take other people at face value; they may not be what they seem.

3 Never arrange to meet someone you've only ever previously met on the Internet without first telling your parents, getting their permission and taking a responsible adult with you.

4 Always stay in the public areas of chat where there are other people around (thus avoiding one-on-one chats where you leave populated areas).

5 Don't open an attachment or downloaded file unless you know and trust the person who has sent it [we'd actually advise children not to open any attachments at all, given that many viruses look like they're being sent from trusted sources].

6 If you find something you don't like on the Internet, save it, print it, log off and tell an adult.

If you'd like to read the full report, you can find it at: ***www.iwf.org.uk/safe/index.htm***.

Kiddonet: recommended for safe surfing and emailing

Iambigbrother: effective

Open that up and inside you'll see addresses and access times all listed neatly in order. You can find the history listing by simply clicking on the History button on the toolbar in Internet Explorer.

EYE SPY

There are plenty of applications out there that can track every aspect of computer use. 007 Starr (***www.iopus.com***), for instance, enables you to log keystrokes, user names, passwords, path names, access times, and window titles of all applications used. It includes a Surfing Spy that logs all URLs of visited sites. Better still, all logged information is stored in a password-protected, encrypted file that can be

There are plenty of applications that track every aspect of Net use

invisibly emailed to your account. And if you've got a technologically sussed kid, don't worry; the program doesn't show up anywhere remotely obvious – they won't know it's there.

There's been plenty of talk about the dangers of predators lurking in chat rooms and you can monitor this specific area with the Iambigbrother application (***www.iambigbrother.com***). This nifty program monitors both incoming and outgoing chats, instant messages, email and Web pages, while remaining undetected by the user. That means that instant chat programs like ICQ and AOL Messenger are all covered.

If you're looking for a slightly lower-key approach, then WebKey's (***www.webkeys.com***) software could be a good bet. SafeGuide, for instance, is a small plug-in for Internet Explorer and doesn't affect any other program. It uses a virtual V-Chip that automatically detects adult content. It doesn't censor, but restricts access to adult sites based on age criteria you've decided on.

ACTION MAN

So you've done a bit of digging around and it turns out that your kid is, in fact, paying the odd visit to sites of an adult persuasion. What can you do about it, short of banning them from any use of the computer?

Blocking and filtering software are both worth thinking about: they enable you to exert some control over the kind of sites your kids are visiting. Probably the best-known of these applications is Net Nanny (***www.netnanny.com***). The power of this particular program comes from the Web-based database compiled by the company. You can choose precisely which sites you feel are safe for your kids to visit, and which ones you'd rather they kept well away from.

One application that impressed us was X-Stop. This doesn't place any limits on chat access, but it does place strong controls on access to pornography and thus seems pitched more at the troublesome teenage boy. Perhaps the most unique feature of the product is the modem feature, which stops anyone from dialling up to anything other than permitted numbers.

PEN FRIENDS

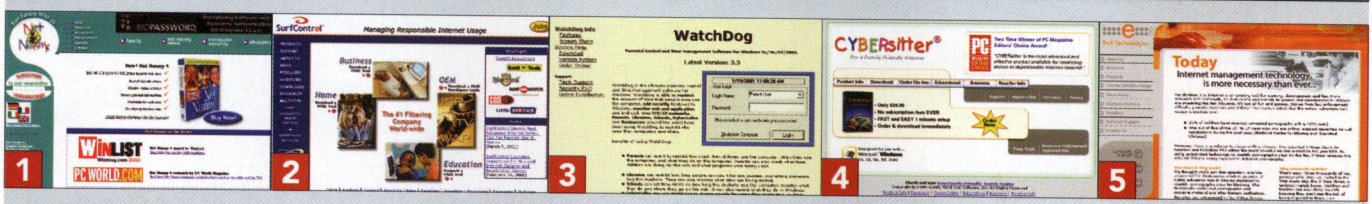
Of course, one of the most popular functions of the Internet is email, and kids in particular have found that this medium's a great way of staying in touch with old friends, making new ones and signing up to email listings about their favourite bands and games. While you can set up an email account for your kids in exactly the same way as you would for yourself, there are some better alternatives.

Net Nanny: top blocking software

Email For Kids (***www.email-connection.com***) is a program that addresses two areas of children's email use. Firstly, it's a fun, child-friendly application which uses bright graphics and a cheerful design to make the whole process less forbidding to the beginner. Secondly, it offers full access control that means that certain words are prohibited and that your children's emails must be approved before being sent.

Some of the better kids portals offer safe email, too. KiddoNet (***www.kiddonet.com***), for instance, offers a safe email account which is accessed from within the safe KiddoNet portal. This means you can set up an email account, safe in the knowledge that it protects curious young minds from the potential hazards of the adult Internet.

FILTERING AND BLOCKING SOFTWARE TESTED



WHICH NET NANNY IS BEST FOR YOU?»

PROGRAM	URL	PRICE	WEB PAGE FILTERING	CUSTOMISABLE SETTINGS	CHAT FILTERING	ACTIVITY LOG LIMITING	ONLINE TIME-KEEPING	RATING
1 Net Nanny 4	***www.netnanny.com***	£34.99	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	★★★★★
The best filtering and blocking software on the market draws from a constantly updated database and includes free updates forever in the cost of the program. What we really liked about NetNanny was the configurable hitlist. If, for instance, there's a site that's being blocked that you'd like your kids to see then you can uncheck. The personal information restrictions also proved to be effective, successfully blocking us from revealing credit card details online.								
2 Cyber Patrol 5	***www.surfcontrol.com***	£35	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	★★★☆☆
With a similar feature-set to Net Nanny, Cyber Patrol offers the same sort of control, but you have to pay an additional £30 fee after 12 months for update access. We found Cyber Patrol's interface easy to navigate, thanks to the use of bright bar charts – particularly the online time-limiting facility. If your 16-year-old's complaining about the sites he or she can see, then Cyber Patrol's multi-user settings will prove useful too.								
3 Watchdog	***www.sarna.net/watchdog***	£17	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	★★★☆☆
If you're not overly concerned about your kids' Web access, but would like to limit their computer time, then this pleasingly-designed application should fit the bill. You can configure the program to allow everyone different amounts of time online and when they're getting close to that limit, there's an audible warning and a message which gives them time to finish up. Clearly written by a parent, there's even a feature to allow them extra time if they ask.								
4 CyberSitter 2000	***www.cybersitter.com***	£30	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	★★★★☆
An extremely customisable program that features a similar feature-set to Net Nanny and offers similar lifetime upgrades – it's Net Nanny's database that just gives it the edge though. What does stand out, however, is CyberSitter's content recognition feature, which can detect dodgy sites whether or not they're in the hitlist. The advanced options, which enable you to block ports, can effectively close down other applications such as IRC chat and POP3 email.								
5 X-Stop	***www.mudcrawler.com***	£40	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	★★★★☆
Pitched more at teenagers than small children, this is a very professional product with a bullet-proof design. One particularly unique feature of X-Stop is that it actually stops certain words from being searched on in search engines, neatly bypassing this thorny problem. The tamper-proof design (you can't delete it via add/remove programs or by trashing the directory) was also impressive.								

SECURE DESTINATIONS FOR CHILDREN

Where to surf in safety»

BEST ISP» AOL

www.aol.co.uk

AOL has made a name for itself by subverting the commonly perceived rules about an ISP. It uses its own dial-up software, it encourages you to view and to use its own-branded content and it offers a variety of parental controls to manipulate kids' access.

The AOL controls function for different age ranges from kids (under 12) through young teen (13-15) and mature teen (16-17). Just remember to remove other ISPs if you want it to work.

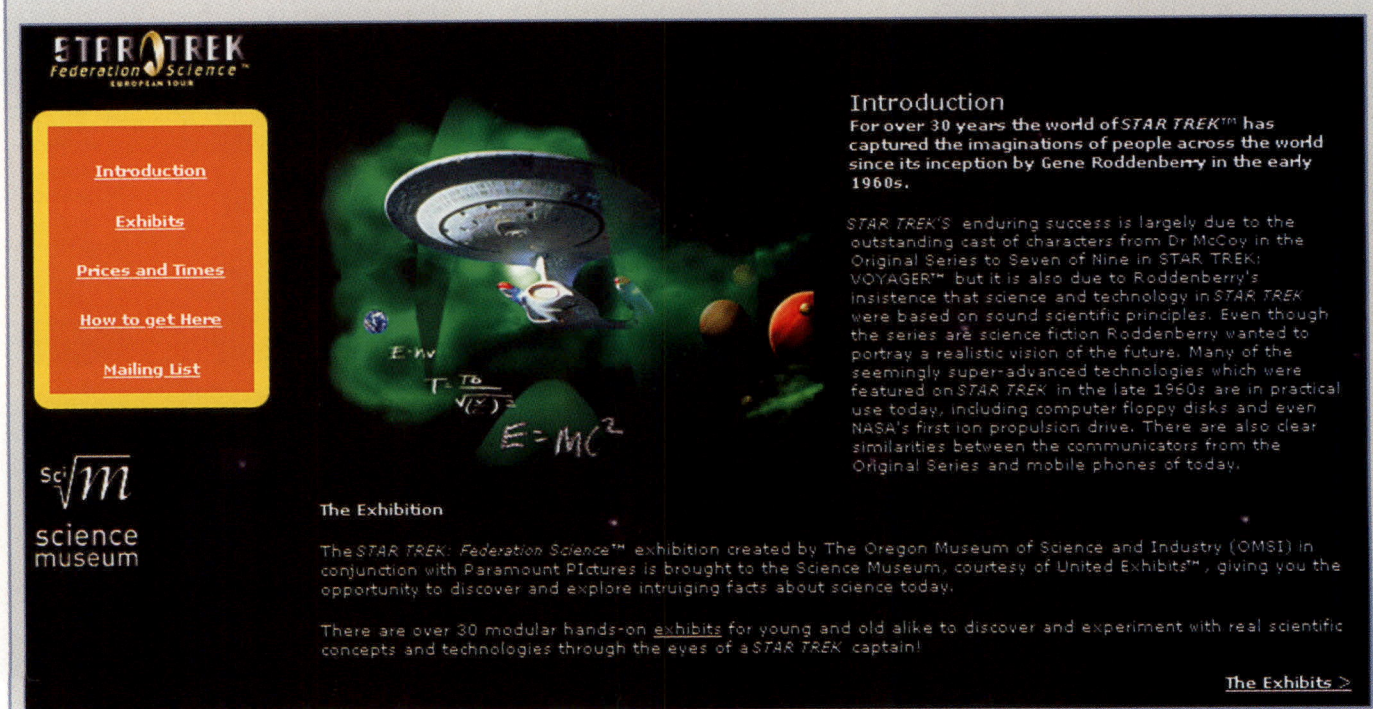
BEST SITE» ATKIDZ

www.atkidz.com

The atkidz Web site caters for all children's online requirements, from connecting to a safe walled world to offering a protected online environment where youngsters can send emails, chat, enter competitions, play games and research their homework assignments.

However, it's the chat feature atkidz has pioneered that's of most interest. All chat room and bulletin board content is first put through an application that detects undesirable swear or sexual words. Then a human moderator vets each message as it appears in real time. If anyone attempts to post an offensive message, the Chatmaster blocks his or her message from appearing and sends the offender a personal warning. If it continues, the Chatmaster removes the offender from the chat room and may even block their PC from logging onto atkidz chat. It's the sort of model other kids' sites would do well to follow.

It's only this kind of rigorously disciplined approach that provides any sort of real safety. Back when the Internet was a lot younger, the vast majority of chatrooms had some sort of supervisor in them, but as the Internet population exploded it became either impractical or undesirable. It's good to see a return to moderated chat – if only for kids.



BEST SITE» SCIENCE MUSEUM

www.sciencemuseum.org.uk

The Internet's full of content that you wouldn't want a child to see, so it's always nice to find a site that accentuates the positive. That's exactly what you'll find at the Science Museum site; masses of genuinely interesting material, written in a lively manner with the express desire of interesting kids in what can be stuffy topics.

The site encourages learning, but there's also a solid emphasis on fun. There's a huge variety of feature material here and it isn't all pitched at young kids; those of secondary school age will find plenty of interest and use here. We rather liked a feature called 'Do your genes drive you to drink?'

Great effort has been made to bring some of these exhibits online. They call these Exhiblets and use the museum's collections to describe important events, discoveries and personalities. Visits to the actual museum can be planned, with activity sheets to print out and take along.

BEST ISSUES SITES» GETNETWISE

www.getnetwise.org

There have been some high profile attempts to raise public consciousness about the dangers of the Internet, in particular Carol Vorderman's mission against paedophiles using chat rooms. However this is a very complicated area, not well served by some of the exaggerated claims that have been printed in the media over the past couple of years.

If you'd like to understand the whole concept of online safety, then the GetNetWise site is a superb starting point. There's a non-sensationalised safety guide, a list of software that can limit and monitor online materials to which kids have access and a round-up of kid-friendly sites.

Of less help is the section on reporting troublemakers, as this is US-based. For better, localised UK information check out ***www.iwf.org.uk***.

BEST PORTAL» NETMOM

www.netmom.com

The overwhelming majority of kid-friendly sites and portals are American based. Over there the whole concept of safety online has been hot news for some time and so there's a considerable amount of material about. What drew us to this particular portal is the volume of material and the quality of the recommendations.

While most of the sites listed at Netmom are American that doesn't detract from their quality and usefulness. We particularly liked the way the whole site was split into sections with headings such as 'For Kids Who Love Science'.

If you're looking for a list of starter URLs then Netmom's sites are perfect. Among the recommended sites are enature (***www.enature.com***), Kidsclick (***www.worldsofsearching.org***) and Storyplace (***www.storyplace.org***).

Kids online at-a-glance

The only 100 percent foolproof way to stop your kids coming across harmful material is to supervise them personally. Software can and will block dodgy Web sites, but the Internet changes so quickly that none of them can ever be completely reliable.

Do install a good filtering/monitoring program like Net Nanny. There's no need to get Orwellian about it, but the fact is that there are people out there you wouldn't want your kids to come into contact with. They're told not to talk to strangers; why should that be any different online?

Make kids aware of the dangers and they look after themselves

Get talking

Make your kids aware of the problems and they'll be able to look after themselves. If they know beforehand that people in chat rooms aren't always who they claim to be, then they'll be far less likely to reveal any personal information when surfing.

Names matter

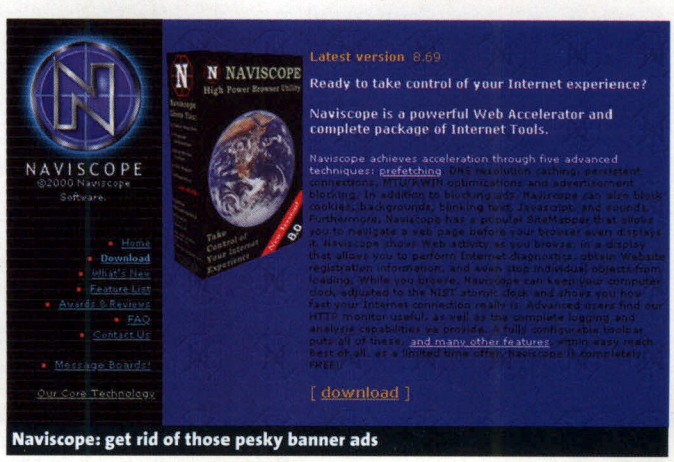
If your kids have their own online usernames (in email or messenger programs for instance) then get them to choose something ambiguous. 'SarahLovesSteps' gives away enough information to pique the interest of any hovering perverts, so instead pick something with no indication of names, ages, locations or hobbies.

Keep numbers safe

There's probably no way you'd willingly give your kid access to your credit card, but can you be certain that he/she hasn't jotted down the details? With a valid credit card number, not only can you go on a nice spending spree, but also gain access to pornographic sites – some of which only use the card as an age check device and don't actually debit any funds, making their use invisible to you. It's probably not advisable to make any Internet purchases in front of kids, just in case the little darlings are noting down the numbers or learning how to buy online at the same time. As test cases in the States have proved, not being aware of your kids' use of your credit card won't get you off the hook when the bill comes in.

What about adverts?

So you've restricted their access to adult Web sites, but what about ads, many of which are specifically designed to lure surfers away from relatively reputable destinations into altogether more dodgy territory? If you install a good proxy such as Naviscope (***www.naviscope.com***) then you can stop all banner adverts from appearing on a Web page – which can come in handy for ad-saturated adults as well as impressionable children.



Naviscope: get rid of those pesky banner ads

Our top 50 ISPs

June 2001 We tested over 200 UK ISPs to bring you the cream of the crop

ISP NAME	WEB ADDRESS	DESCRIPTION	PHONE	EMAIL ADDRESSES
NO MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION You pay as you go, making these perfect for evenings and weekends				
F9 Free	www.f9.net.uk	Surftime, ADSL, and the generic free dial-up account for the home user	0800 0737800	Unlimited
Free Online	www.free-online.net	Straightforward free ISP offering news and email	0870 7060504	5
Sniff Out	www.sniffout.net	Free Internet provider with features, content and technical support	01883 742510	Unlimited
Gateway 2000	www.ukgateway.net	Family-friendly free ISP with plenty of shareware and gaming	Sign up Online	5
The X-Stream Network	www.x-stream.com	Uses on-screen advertising to offer 0800 deals and voice/fax email	0870 7306466	1 unified
Powergen	www.pgen.net	ISP from Powergen, the energy supply company	Sign up online	5
Freeserve	www.freeserve.net	Free provider from the Dixons group of companies. Surftime available	0990 500049	Unlimited
Free Internet	www.free-internet.co.uk	Free access, free mail and Web space	Sign up online	1
Freenet	www.freenet.co.uk	Free access with a gaming bias. Online auto signup and newsgroups	01329 828282	Unlimited
Dabsol	www.dabsol.net	Free ISP with online sign-up help and comprehensive features	Sign up online	Unlimited
Smartone	www.smartone.co.uk	Content based service offering free dial-ups and rewards for visiting	08700 774411	1 Unified
Go Free	www.gofree.co.uk	Free ISP offering online signup, complete with helpline	Sign up online	Unlimited
Breathe	www.breathe.co.uk	Recently went into external administration, but still trading as an ISP	0800 500150	5
Freewire	www.freewire.net	Free ISP without any signup requirements– dial up to 0845 088 0088	Sign up online	Unlimited
Tiny Online	www.tinyonline.net	Innovative ISP with a beginner's guide to the Net	0900 290 9103	5
Callnet	www.callnetuk.com	Innovative free ISP offering enhanced Web-based services	0207 3358300	5
Virgin Net	www.virgin.net	Long-standing ISP now offering a stylish free Internet access service	0500 558800	5
OrbitalNet	www.orbitalnet.co.uk	Subscription-based ISP with a range of account options	01233 646505	5
UK Online Ltd	www.ukonline.co.uk	A family-friendly free ISP with plenty of shareware and gaming software	01749 333333	1
Eisdosnet	www.eidosnet.co.uk	From Eidos, publishers of Tomb Raider and other games	Sign up online	Unlimited
Wireplay Internet	www.wireplay.com	Gameplay-owned with fast access to games servers and the Web	0845 757 7577	None
This is it!	www.thisisit.co.uk	End-user targeted free ISP	0906 9124000	Unlimited
MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION Flat-fee packages and specialist ISPs; ideal for peak-time surfing				
Aviators Network	www.aviators.net	An ISP designed with aircraft-related content for the enthusiast	0700 2842867	1
Timewarp Internet	www.timewarp.co.uk	ADSL, dial-up and Web site consultancy	0161 950 8855	1
Internet in Nottingham Ltd	www.innotts.co.uk	Local midlands provider with a long track record	0115 956 2222	1
Luna Internet	www.luna.co.uk	Small customer-friendly ISP soon to offer Surftime packages	01782 855 655	1
Paradise Internet	www.pins.co.uk	A subscription provider who also author software.	01256 414863	1
AOL	www.aol.co.uk	A large ISP offering an 'ease of use' oriented service	0800 3765432	5
Compuserve	www.compuserve.com	Long-standing ISP who offer proprietry software to aid ease of use	0990 000200	5
ClaraNET Ltd	www.clara.net	Subscription-based ISP with account options to suit any needs	0800 3582828	Unlimited
Which? Online	www.which.net	A free ISP from the consumer affairs magazine of the same name	0645 830240	1
Demon Internet	www.demon.co.uk	Launched in 1992, the first dial-up service around	0800 4589666	Unlimited
BUSINESS ISPs Service providers for small businesses				
Firstnet Services Ltd	www.firstnet.co.uk	Bespoke and tailored solutions for education and corporate markets	0113 2944224	Unlimited
AdeptWeb Ltd	www.adept.co.uk	Full ISP service range and an ASP service for business accounts software	01843 850444	Unlimited
Knowall	www.knowall.net	Large business ISP for SMEs and home users with business interests	0207 6101115	Unlimited
London Web Comms	www.londonweb.net	London ISP offering connection and design to consumer and business	0208 3494500	3
UUNet	www.uk.uu.net	Wide range of business solutions and Pipex Dial	08702 424220	12
CYBERphile Internet	www.cyberphile.co.uk	Business-oriented Midlands-based provider	01543 454840	1
netcib	www.netcib.co.uk	Have recently taken over from AngliaNet	01473 211922	1
Netscalibur	www.netscalibur.co.uk	Promising pan-European provider taking the place of Dircon	0800 0720000	Unlimited
NewNet Limited	www.newnet.co.uk	Five years experience in the industry	0845 355 44 55	1
Nildram	www.nildram.net	Offers a range of business packages	0800 0720460	Unlimited
FDD Ltd	www.fdd.co.uk	A Netscalibur-acquired company offering IP integration services	01865 321003	1
UKIP Ltd	www.ukip.co.uk	Internet consultants offering access and business advice	01772 908000	1
CIX	www.cix.co.uk	Specialise in conferencing and voiceover IP solutions for business	0845 3555050	Unlimited
Charis Internet Services	www.charis.co.uk	Customer support for online businesses	0121 248 5800	1
GTS Netcom	www.netcom.net.uk	Dial-ups, Web hosting and leased line access for business	0800 9809107	20
UVNET	www.uv.net	Rare free ISP offering support on standard national number	01753 776699	1
Easynet Ltd	www.easynet.net	Subscription-based dial up service	0171 6814444	Unlimited
Datanet International Ltd.	www.data.net.uk	Business access for London and the Home Counties	01252 810081	Unlimited

KEY **EMAIL ADDRESSES** *The number of free email addresses your ISP will provide.* **CONTENT** *Outlines whether the service provider provides exclusive content.* **MAC SUPPORT** *Not all service providers offer software and tech support for Apple Macs.* **MODEM SUPPORT** *Check your hardware to see whether your ISP can get the best out of your modem.*

Reliability, speed of connection and value for money are the three criteria we weigh up to objectively identify the best ISPs and award star ratings.

Variation in modem speed Measures whether you get a constant speed once connected. Each ISP starts with 100 percent and loses position the greater the variance in connection speed.

Variation in time to connect The reading is taken from the stage between clicking 'Connect' and physical connection.

Availability Measures how many times an ISP refuses to connect, through the engaged tone or failure to respond correctly to modem signals.

Our ISP testing is carried out by NetBasics, an independent company specialising in providing ISP information for consumers and businesses. NetBasics makes every effort to ensure that the data presented to you is correct. The publishers of *the net* and NetBasics cannot be held liable for any damages caused by the publication of this data. Any ISP that wishes to be included in the evaluation programme should contact ***eval@netbasics.com***. For more information on NetBasics, visit its Web site at ***www.netbasics.com***.

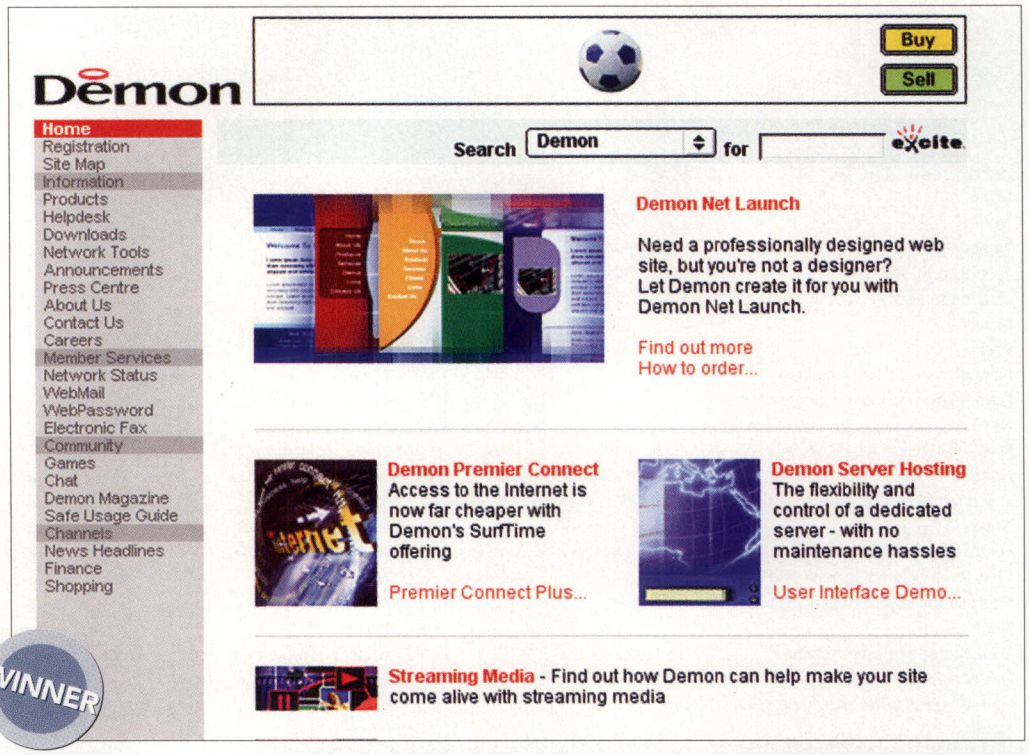
CONTENT	MAC SUPPORT	MODEM SUPPORT	SET-UP FEE (£)	MONTHLY CHARGE (£)	PHONE SUPPORT CHARGES	PHONE SUPPORT HOURS	VERDICT: RELIABILITY AND SPEED
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	None	National	7-11, 7 Days	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	None	None	Premium Rate	24/7	★★★★★
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	None	None	National rate	24/7	★★★★★
Yahoo! portal site	No	V.90	None	None	Metered	24/7	★★★★★
Chat, news, lifestyle, shopping and finance	No	K56flex	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★★
None	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★★
None	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★★
Newsgroups and IE5 download.	No	V.90	None	None	Metered	24/7	★★★★★
Games links and independent status	Yes	K56Flex, X2	None	None	National rates	9-6pm M-S. 10-5pm Sun	★★★★☆
None	No	V.90	None	None	Metered	24/7	★★★★☆
Portal site with general links	Yes	V.90	None	None	Metered	9-6pm M-S, 10-5pm Sun	★★★★☆
None	No	V.90	None	None	Metered	24/7	★★★★☆
Entertainment, sport, shopping, finance	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★☆
None	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★☆
Search engine, Hotmail, channels, Tiny PC sales	No	V.90	None	None	Local	24/7	★★★★☆
Chat servers, channels, news and Webmail	Yes	K56Flex	None	None	Free	24/7	★★★☆☆
Virgin channels including news, web TV/radio	Yes	X2	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★☆☆
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	None	None	Local	Business Hours	★★★☆☆
Comprehensive portal content	Yes	K56Flex	None	None	25p per minute	24/7	★★☆☆☆
Free access to the Mplayer games network.	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★☆☆☆
Games news, games chat, games add-ons.	No	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	None	50p per minute	12-12, 7 days	★★☆☆☆
None	No	K56Flex	None	None	£1 per min/via email	24/7	★★☆☆☆
Listings including flight planning and navigation	No	K56Flex	None	11.75	Standard	9am-9pm	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	100 p/a	Metered	9am-7pm	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	See Site	Local	24	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	12.50	Local	8am-9pm	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, X2	None	8	National	11am-7pm M-F	★★★★★
From chat to holidays, with AOL software	Yes	V.90	None	9.99	Free	8-10.30 M-F, 9am-9.30pm S	★★★★☆
Large range of channels and search engine	No	V.90	None	7.50	National	8-12 Midnight, 7 days	★★☆☆☆
None	Yes	K56Flex, X2	None	8.99	Free	24/7	★★☆☆☆
Online shopping with consumer protection	Yes	K56Flex	None	7.75	Free	24/7	★★☆☆☆
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	11.75	Local	24/7	★★☆☆☆
Search engines and support	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	12.50	Local	Business hours	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K65Flex	None	100 p/a	Local	8.30am-6pm	★★★★★
Business search, 12 channels, domain registration	No	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	None	Metered	24/7	★★★★★
None	Yes	K56Flex	15.00	12.50	Standard	9am-9pm M-Sa	★★★★★
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	Apply	Apply	Call	9-8pm M-F, 10-6 pm Sat	★★★★★
None	Yes	33.6	None	11.74	Standard	8.30am-6pm M-F	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	11.75	Mobile	9-5 M-F, 8-9 S, 12-6 Sun	★★★★★
None	Yes	K56Flex, X2	None	11.49	Local	9am-9pm	★★★★☆
None	Yes	V.90	None	99.49 p/a	Local	9am-10pm	★★★★☆
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	None	11.75	Local	8am-9pm	★★★★☆
None	Yes	V.90	None	22 p/a	Free	9am-5.30pm	★★★☆☆
None	Yes	V.90	None	125 p/a	National	8am-6pm	★★★☆☆
None	Yes	V.90	None	14.99	Local	8-10pm M-F, 11-6pm S/S	★★★☆☆
None	Yes	V.90	None	15	Free	8am-7pm	★★★☆☆
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	None	14.95	National	24/7	★★☆☆☆
None	Yes	V.90	None	None	Free	24/7	★★☆☆☆
None	Yes	K56Flex	None	11.99	Free	24/7	★★☆☆☆
None	Yes	V.90	None	5.87	National	24/7	★★☆☆☆

SET-UP FEE *Some ISPs charge a fee to open an account.* **MONTHLY CHARGE** *If you don't go with a free ISP, then you'll pay a set monthly fee.* **PHONE SUPPORT CHARGES** *Tech support's great – as long as you're not having to pay a fortune for it.* **PHONE SUPPORT HOURS** *When the tech support desk will be open to take your calls.*

The ISPs of the Year

It's been a confusing year for the ordinary surfer – but certain ISPs have shone through the uncertainty. Presenting our guide to the best, and worst, of the UK's service providers

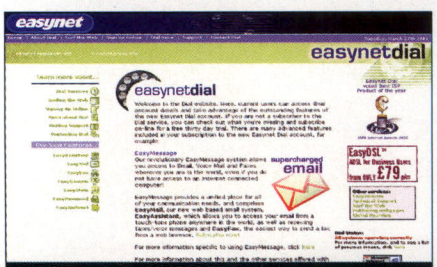
BEST OVERALL ISP
DEMON INTERNET



FOUNDED IN 1992, WHEN THE ONLY people using the Internet were college students and scientists, Demon (***www.demon.net***) opened up the world of email, the Web and Mahir to ordinary punters. Since then it has ridden out the fluctuations, the massive growth and the nose-dives of the market by offering a consistently good service.

Unlike many ISPs, Demon didn't leap onto the 'unmetered' dial-up bandwagon because it realised it was an unworkable model – never has the adage 'you get what you pay for' been more true. Instead they charge a monthly subscription, for which you get first-rate Internet access, WAP access, Web hosting and, of course, all the usual stuff like multiple email addresses. Our own testing with NetBasics ranked their Surftime access the best around and the same will undoubtedly be said of their FRIACO-based flat-fee service when they launch it.

WINNER



BEST FOR GAMING
EASYNET

SPECIALISED GAMING ISPS ARE EMERGING, BUT service concerns remain, particularly in the case of NGUK, whose message forums are abuzz with irritated users. Instead, we've plumped for Easynet (***www.easydial.co.uk***), a company that just gets on with the job.

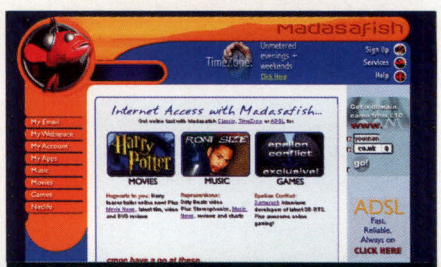
Easynet didn't bother with Surftime when it first came out, probably realising it was a hopelessly flawed product. To this end it has carried on offering a standard per-minute dial-up backed up by a whole host of innovative features such as new messaging facilities.

Why are we recommending a per-minute ISP as best for games? Because most games are simply unplayable on the budget Surftime or 0800-based dial-ups. If you want the ping, you're going to have to pay for it.

BEST FOR BUDGET
BIGBLUESKY

THE 0800 DIAL-UP MODEL IS ONE THAT'S VERY hard to make work, but it's one that BigBlueSky (***www.bigbluesky.uk.net***) is powering ahead with. For £25 a year, you get 24/7 Internet access through an 0800 number – and that's it. If you don't fancy paying per-minute phone charges, or a Surftime subscription, or even a monthly access fee, then this is the dial-up to use.

We have had problems connecting to the service (it sometimes takes two or three attempts), but these are username/password issues and not busy lines and we're told that the situation is being resolved, so we remain hopeful. Support staff were very helpful, despite the fact this is billed as a no-frills budget dial-up. With consistent access speeds and good gaming support, BBS are difficult to criticise.



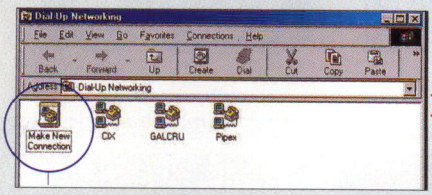
MOST PROMISING NEWCOMER
MADASAFISH

MADASAFISH (***www.madasafish.com***) PITCHES itself as a games-biased ISP and in that particular arena it does an extremely good job. But what's worth remembering is that games players are among the most demanding of Internet users, and if a dial-up offers excellent in-game pings then you can guarantee it'll also be excellent for general Web surfing needs and sending and receiving email.

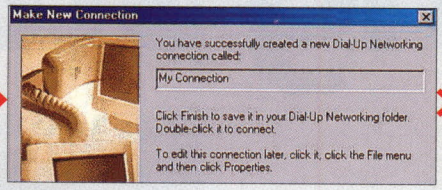
The ISP offers a wide range of dial-ups, from standard free 0845-based dial-ups to an off-peak 0800 style dial-up through to ADSL-based products. At the time of writing they don't offer a 24/7 0800 dial-up, because they're placing their emphasis squarely on broadband connections, but they're well worth keeping an eye on in the next year or so.

WHY BE AT THE MERCY OF ONE CONNECTION?

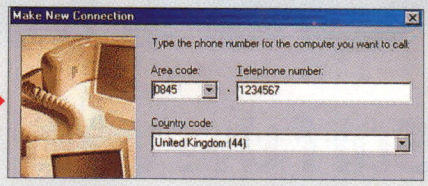
HOW TO SWITCH ISPS IN SECONDS»



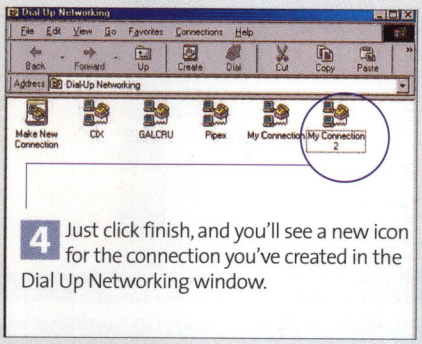
1 To make your new connection, go Start > Programs > Accessories > Communications > Dial Up Networking. Then just click the 'make new connection' icon.



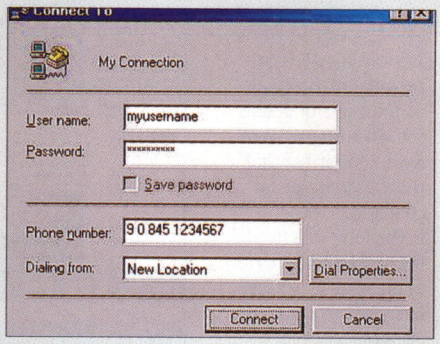
2 Start by typing in your intended ISP's name (your PC should automatically choose your modem), then click Next.



3 Now type in the new ISP's telephone number (you'll get this just by calling them and asking) and make sure you choose the correct country to show where you're dialling from.



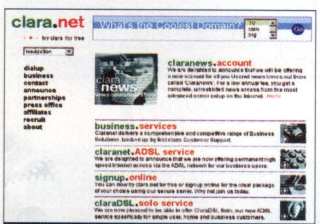
4 Just click finish, and you'll see a new icon for the connection you've created in the Dial Up Networking window.



TOP TIPS

Copy the new connections onto your desktop. That way, when one ISP won't connect, you can simply switch to another one in seconds, rather than having to navigate back to the Dial Up Networking window.

5 Double-click the new icon to access the window into which you should input the username and password supplied by the new ISP. Hit 'connect', and dialling should begin...



BEST FOR BUSINESS
CLARA.NET

BUSINESSES KNOW BETTER THAN anyone else that quality costs. Clara.Net (***www.clara.net***) isn't the cheapest ISP by some margin, but it has concentrated on making their business offerings, from Internet access through to Web hosting and leased line provision, among the best available.

Clara's support lines are always rated highly and, like Demon, you're always kept fully informed about the status of every part of the network. The dial-up works first time every time and offers among the best speeds and bandwidth loading we've come across.

Companies looking for Web hosting could do much worse than Clara's Cobalt RaQ-based managed server boxes, which start at £150 a month. If you regard Web site down time as a no-no then the Cobalt server capacity of 10 million Web page hits should see you right. A reliable way to get your online business off the ground.

HALL OF SHAME
REDHOTANT

VISIT SOME OF THE ISP USER sites (***www.ispreview.co.uk*** and ***www.net4nowt.com***) and look up Redhotant – rarely has an ISP managed to anger so many subscribers in so short a time. It all started so well (a year's 0800 access, even at 128k over ISDN, for £50), but once word got round, Redhotant (***www.redhotant.com)*** simply couldn't cope and the whole ISP imploded.

Rather than changing its business model, however, RHA simply upped its prices a bit and carried on signing up new customers, while existing punters found themselves completely unable to connect to the service. At the moment the service is in limbo, with Kevin Wall, the managing director, alluding to the reinstatement of services via either FRIACO or some sort of American-based deal. We're not holding our breath on that and we doubt the thousands of mightily-disappointed RHA customers are, either...

Net Basics
The Internet in Focus
ISP Directory

Blow through the mist surrounding Internet Service Provision with desktop software designed by NetBasics, the leading ISP industry research organisation.

The ISP Directory features over 100 key facts and pricing information for nearly 200 UK ISPs including every industry leader.

For further info, visit:
www.netbasics.com

Net Basics™
NetBasics, The Internet in Focus
info@netbasics.com
Telephone 0113 246 0009 in the UK

Getting started

Surf the Web

SIMPLE, THIS. YOU NEED A computer (commonly a PC running Microsoft Windows, but some people use strange things called Apple Macintoshes), a means of connecting to the Internet (a modem device usually built into the computer, plus an account to dial in to) and a means of seeing the Web pages (that's a browser).

BROWSERS Usually free of charge and pre-installed on new PCs. If not, you can download one from the Internet (use your employer's network; it'll be cheaper and quicker) or from a CD (you'll find them in magazines like this one). Current champion is Microsoft's Internet Explorer (***www.microsoft.com/windows/ie***), but lagging not far behind is Netscape's reliable, adaptable and recently much-improved Navigator (***home.netscape.com/uk/download***). However, there are many 'rebel' browsers either designed for a specific computing platform or boasting strength at a particular function (see below).

NET CONNECTION Most modern PCs come with a built-in modem, a device that will dial your Internet Service Provider (see p106) and connect you to the Internet. Most modems these days run at 56K; OK, but hardly rapid fire. If you want to go quicker, you'll need to look at either 64K/128K ISDN, eg BT's Home Highway, or else 10Mbps ADSL (a permanent, zip-quick connection; for details see ***www.btopenworld.com***). Remember that most ISPs charge for connection, either in the form of a fixed fee (say £9.99 a month) or on a pay-as-you-go basis (say 1p a minute). Consider at what times you surf most and exactly how much before choosing your tariff.

TOP TIP

Work by night

If you've got a flat-fee dial-up, then make the most of it. Instead of using valuable online time watching files download, have these saved overnight. Get a download manager, such as Flashget or Go!Zilla and schedule those large downloads at night, leaving you full bandwidth for surfing.

YOUR COMPUTER Virtually every modern PC is quick enough to handle the software required to surf the Internet. Your only choice really is platform: while most plump for PCs running Microsoft Windows, recent years have seen a resurgence in the fortunes of the Apple Mac (mostly thanks to the cutesy iMac). Needless to say, new Internet software is written for PC first, Mac some time after – and the huge and growing online gaming industry is virtually built around PC.

Explorer 5.5: plain grey in PC guise; functional but extremely solid

New Netscape 6.01: colourful and funky, and now said to be more stable

BORED WITH EXPLORER OR NETSCAPE?

BROWSER ALTERNATIVES>>

PC BROWSERS

BROWSER	RATING	FOR	AGAINST	DOWNLOAD FROM
AMAYA	★★☆☆☆	Great for those into Net standards...	...not for those who aren't	*www.w3.org/Amaya/User/BinDist.html*
ARACHNE	★★☆☆☆	It runs in DOS and is written by Czechs	A pain to set up	*arachne.cz*
CUSTOM BROWSER	★☆☆☆☆	Adds minimal extra customisation to IE	It's just IE with an ad in the top panel	*www.custombrowser.com*
HOTJAVA	★★☆☆☆	Pretty showcase for Java technology	Slow, though not as bad as on the Mac	*java.sun.com/products/hotjava/3.0*
INTERNET EXPLORER	★★★★★	For the moment, the king of all browsers	Hard to fault, unless you really try	*www.microsoft.com/windows/ie*
LYNX	★★★★☆	The original text-only browser	If it isn't text, Lynx isn't interested	*lynx.browser.org*
MOSAIC	★★★☆☆	Good for developers	Feels old. Is old. Not updated since 1996	*www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/SDG/Software/mosaic-w*
NEOPLANET	★★★★☆	Funky interface replacement for Explorer	Internet Explorer in new clothes	*www.neoplanet.com*
NETSCAPE NAVIGATOR 6	★★★★☆	Wide range of features for hardcore users	Doesn't display pages as prettily as IE	*www.netscape.co.uk*
OPERA	★★★★☆	Faster than IE or Netscape	Bit of a stickler for standards	*www.opera.com*
MSN EXPLORER	★★★★☆	Easy to use, integrates with PIM functions	Right now, it's US-only content	*msn.explorer.com*
MAC BROWSERS				
ICAB	★★★★☆	Fast. Gets rid of irritating ad banners	Could support more features	*www.icab.de*
INTERNET EXPLORER 5.0	★★★★★	State-of-the-art browsing on the Mac	Can be memory-hungry	*www.microsoft.com/Mac/ie*
NETSCAPE NAVIGATOR 6.01	★★★★★	Packed with features; look can be themed	Has .01 update made it less buggy?	*www.netscape.com*
OPERA FOR MAC	★★★★☆	Fast; offers tons of control over page look	Still in 'Technology Preview' guise	*www.opera.com/download/mac*

Send and receive email

EMAIL: THE STUFF THAT HAS THE Royal Mail quivering in its boots (after all, who sends letters any more?). But before you can enjoy the visceral thrills of sending mail instantly through cyberspace (80 percent of email apparently makes it to its recipient within five minutes) you'll need an address and a means of sending and receiving your post.

The former you can get either by signing up with an Internet Service Provider (or ISP, see page 106), getting one from your employer (many firms now have big networks and will afford you a name as part of the job), or through one of the Web-based email service providers (such as Yahoo!, Hotmail, excite, etc). But what are the pros and cons of each option?

WEB-BASED EMAIL Dead handy if you travel a lot; once you have your password after signing up, you can check your mail from any Internet café or any place with a Net-linked PC.

Some Web-based email service providers even offer the facility to forward and send mail through such desktop software as Microsoft Outlook or Eudora. The catch? Many have a rather clumsy interface, and sending and receiving mail can be slow, especially when America wakes up in the morning and logs on. Make sure you keep a duplicate of your address book and favourites on your hard drive, otherwise if your Web-based account goes down, so do all your contact details. If you fancy checking it out, you can start an account at ***www.yahoo.co.uk***, or head along to either ***www.hotmail.com*** or ***www.excite.co.uk***.

YOUR SERVICE PROVIDER When you sign up with an ISP, you'll be given at least one email address to use, and most will even provide the email software you need to get started (which is usually Outlook, although do remember that you're rarely stuck with it; you can choose any from between the leading packages outlined in the column to the right).

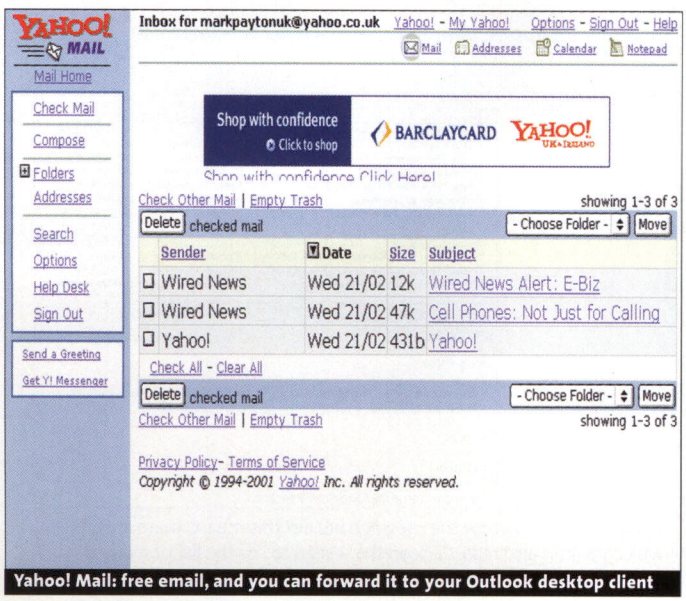
The catch? You may find it difficult to read email from these accounts at your work-place, unless you can be bothered to manually forward mail to your-self for the next day, which could prove a tiring process.

YOUR EMPLOYER This usually means using whatever software your employer provides (which is invariably the networked version of Outlook), and you can't access your email from home using your own PC (unless your bosses love you enough to set you up there as well). The upside? It's all free of charge.

TOP TIP

Don't waste money on mail

If you only really use your dial-up account for email, then you're wasting a lot of money. Get a free email address at Hotmail or Yahoo and instead use a free per minute dial-up account – it'll work out much cheaper than paying subscription costs as long as you remember to compose emails offline and only connect to send.

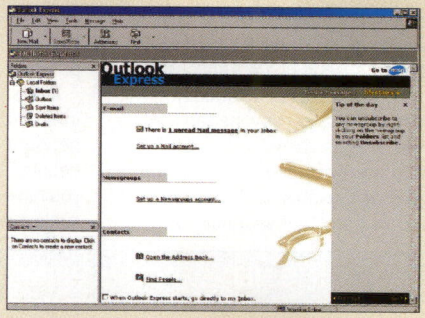


Yahoo! Mail: free email, and you can forward it to your Outlook desktop client

ARE THE RIGHT PEOPLE HANDLING YOUR POST?

EMAIL CLIENTS>>

Microsoft Outlook Express 5 ★★★★☆

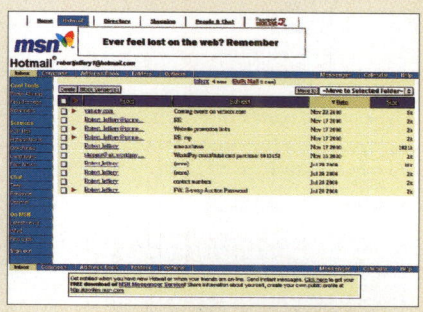


If your PC came with IE5+, you're most likely already using Express 5. And that's a good thing: the latest Outlook is easy to use and set up, and now features such useful extras as Hotmail support (you can download your Hotmail messages for working offline, or synch your Hotmail and Express address books). And with so many families now having individual email addresses, Outlook makes setting up individual accounts fuss free. Available for both PC and Mac, the download is at ***www.microsoft.com/windows/oe***.

Eudora 5.0 ★★★★★

Launched back in September, the latest Eudora is available in Paid ($49.95), Sponsored and Light modes. Both of the latter can be grabbed free from ***www.eudora.com***. While Light is stripped down, Sponsored features ads (see picture, right). Either way, the Eudora package is excellent; the interface is attractive and intuitive, while the package integrates well with the address book. 5.0 even includes a novel 'MoodWatcher' – a feature that affords mail a 'red chilli pepper' rating according to the strength of its 'inflammatory' language.

MSN Hotmail ★★★★☆



The web-based service that got the whole ball rolling. Sign up for a free account, and get an email address and a password. There's a 2Mb limit on your inbox, and an Inbox Protector to fight off spam mail. The Hotmail Alert service will notify your pager or mobile telephone of incoming messages. Sign up at ***www.hotmail.com***, or try either ***www.yahoo.co.uk*** or ***www.excite.co.uk*** instead; the services are all pretty similar.

Netscape Mail ★★★★☆

Now bundled in with the new Netscape 6 browser, Mail runs Outlook Express neck-and-neck; as with the Microsoft product, there's full integration with its built-in address book. True to the philosophy of the 6 browser, the themed Mail interface tries to pack in as much 'user friendliness' as possible. The 'My Sidebar' feature, for example, is carried over from the browser. Don't forget to go grab the latest, de-bugged update to 6 (6.01) from ***www.netscape.com***.

Newsgroups

Whatever topic tickles your fancy, there'll be a newsgroup dedicated to it on the Net. Here's how to join up

Newsgroups are one of the older services on the Internet. Each group is like a bulletin board – anyone can post messages to different newsgroups, and anyone can read the postings. There are tens of thousands of different newsgroup subjects available, so there will be one that matches your interests, whether you're looking for info on beekeeping or book-keeping, computers or comics, sewing or sailing.

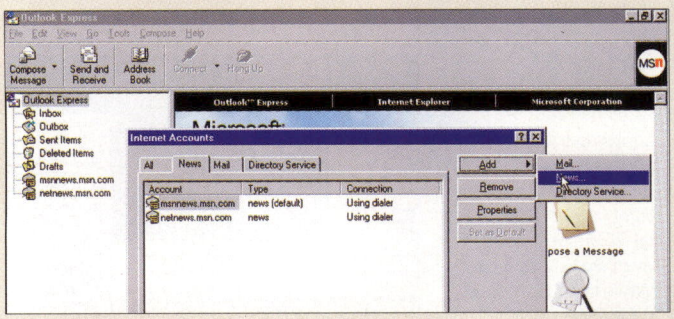
Although the Web has plenty of information on most subjects, newsgroups will often provide more detailed answers to questions. If you have a question on a specific subject, you can receive half a dozen responses in two hours. The most famous newsgroup system is Usenet. This is structured like a tree, with a few large branches and thousands of smaller ones. The large branches are top-level discussion categories, such as rec (recreation), which contain smaller branches, such as rec.art. These categories contain messages themselves but are also broken down further into even more specific branches, such as rec.arts.comics, which contain messages from people who are interested in that topic.

If you don't want to go to the bother of configuring Outlook Express or other newsgroup access software, visit DejaNews ***www.deja.com*** – a Web-based interface to newsgroups. You can read and send messages from here, all via your Web browser. Simple.

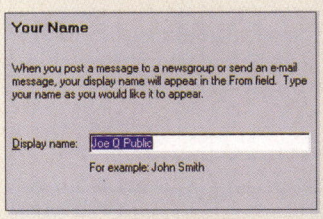
Your ISP will provide you with its own news server access, or visit ***esalesbiz.com/web/nntplst.htm*** which links to hundreds of free access news servers. To add more servers to Outlook Express, go through the setting-up steps outlined below.

ACCESSING NEWSGROUPS USING OUTLOOK EXPRESS

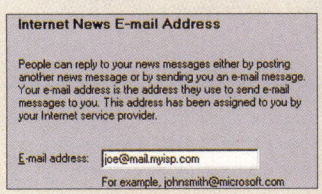
STEP BY STEP>>



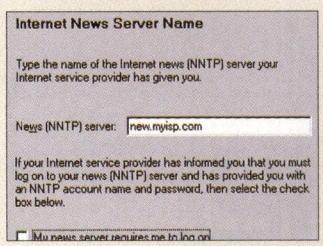
1 Go to the Accounts entry in the Tools menu, click on the News tab to list your current news accounts (if any), hit Add and choose News.



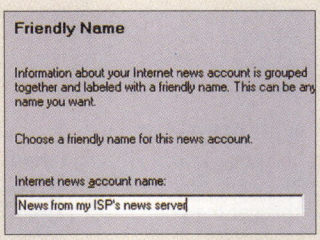
2 Type in your name. This will be displayed in any message you post to a newsgroup. Then hit Next.



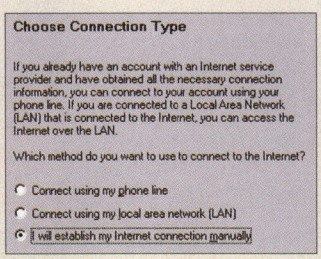
3 Type in your email address. This will be displayed in any message you post. Then click Next.



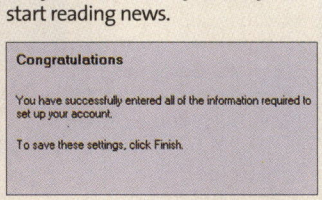
4 Enter the name of your ISP's server which should be given in your user documentation.



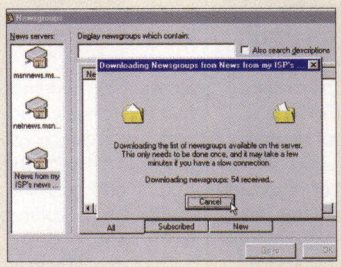
5 Give the news server a name that makes sense to you.



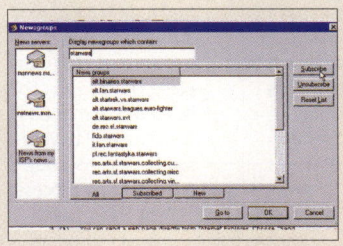
6 Tell Outlook Express that you will dial your ISP manually before you start reading news.



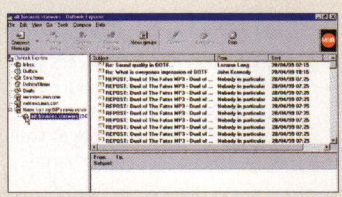
7 And you're done! You have now set up a newsgroup access account. Now let's see how to use it.



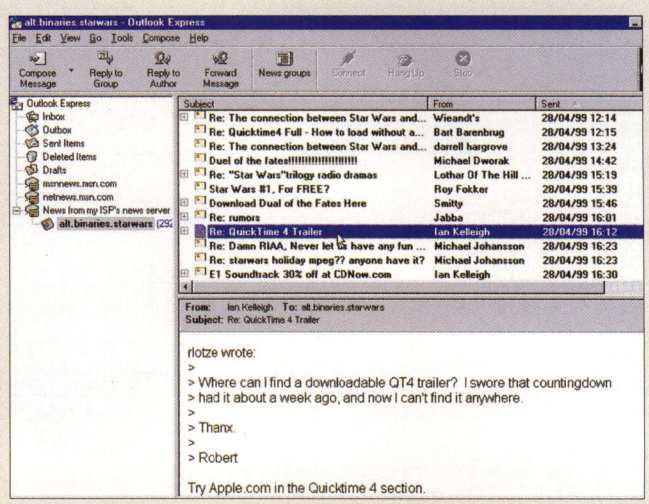
8 After hitting Close, you're asked if you want to download your ISP's list of newsgroups. When you click Yes, the list will be downloaded, so make sure you're online. This can take up to 10 minutes when you first connect, because you are downloading the names of thousands of newsgroups.



9 Once all the newsgroups are downloaded, you can explore. If you want to find *Star Wars* postings, for example, type 'starwars' into the text field at the top of the window to display all newsgroups containing that word. You can subscribe to as many groups as you want.



10 To access a message inside a newsgroup, click on the subject header to read a summary. Double click the header and the whole message downloads, appearing on the lower half of the screen.



11 If there is a '+' sign by the message header this means there are replies which you can also read. Click on the '+' sign to see the list of replies.

Online chat

How to hold virtual conversations with friends and strangers, experts and celebrities

Online chat lets you communicate with other people, often in real time. In other words, you type in comments, send them over the Net and they're seen almost immediately. And you're only paying for a local phone call, even if you are 'talking' to someone on the other side of the world.

You can 'chat' with friends and relatives in other countries without running up massive phone bills. Or join in an online discussion on your favourite subject with an expert.

There's the opportunity to ask a celebrity questions during a moderated 'conference', or talk to complete strangers on the other side of the world.

'Smileys' are a way of including an indication of emotion in your messages. They are useful when, for example, you are making a joke and you want to be sure that the recipient realises you're not being serious. Hang a relevant smiley on the end of your sentence by typing in the relevant characters, but do try not to over-use them.

To 'read' them, just turn the page 90 degrees to the left ;-) got it? Here are the four most used smileys:

- :-) The original smiley. Indicates a joke, or just a happy person!
- ;-) Wink
- :-o Shock (an open mouth)
- :-(Unhappy

Don't register your details with a site unless you really want to. Often chat software will ask for your name and other info. Be wary; you don't know what it'll be used for.

If you are looking for romance online, use caution. Don't reveal your home address and if you decide to meet up, make sure someone knows where you're going, as you would if meeting someone from a magazine or newspaper ad.

If text chat seems a bit flat, try 3D chat, where users take on a 'persona' and actually walk round chat rooms. Try ***www.virtualzones.com*** for starters.

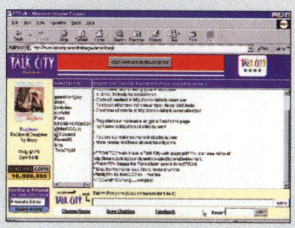
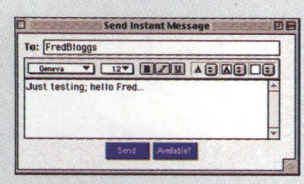
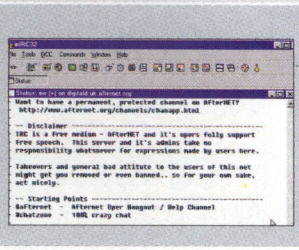
TOP TIP

Find-a-friend

Thanks to advances in technology, Internet Phone services are now viable concerns. For a fraction of the cost, you can place a call from a PC (using a microphone headset) to a phone anywhere. Search for PC-to-phone at Yahoo! or try Yahoo!'s Messenger-based service.

THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SPEAK TO THE WORLD...

CHAT CHOICES>>

TYPE OF CHAT		FOR & AGAINST	CHAT LINK
LIVE ON A WEB SITE Takes place within the window of your browser on a Web site. Messages come up instantly and can be seen by everyone who is viewing that Web page.		**FOR** Easy to use; no extra software required to run it. **AGAINST** Works on someone's Web site, so the subject will be dictated by them and private chat is unlikely.	***www.talkcity.com*** Online community where you can talk on various subjects, including romance and current affairs.
MODERATED SESSIONS Moderated chats are 'supervised' by a chat room host, who decides whether or not to allow your comments or questions to be displayed. This is the norm for celebrity chats.		**FOR** Discussions are sensibly run. Abusive or annoying people may be screened out. **AGAINST** Only take place at certain times because they require a moderator to be present on the site. Censorship.	***www.chat.beeb.com*** The BBC's celebrity chat service with daily visits from the network's top stars.
REAL-TIME USING EXTRA SOFTWARE Software like AOL's Instant Messenger and ICQ allow you to chat in real time. You don't use a Web browser; the software takes care of everything.		**FOR** Instant response; ability to chat privately to one person. **AGAINST** Requires extra software. Some firms don't allow this to be installed on their PCs, so you may not be able to chat at work.	***www.aol.co.uk/aim*** ***www.icq.com*** Chat one-to-one with your friends in real time on the Net.
IRC IRC (Internet Relay Chat) software lets you talk to many people at once. It can be a pain to use, however; it was, after all, modelled on CB radio.		**FOR** Useful, technical chats are often held on IRC channels. **AGAINST** Software is difficult to use; IRC users can be impatient with newcomers.	***www.mirc.com*** Although it can be tricky to get used to, mIRC is the best software for IRC chat. ***www.ircle.com*** IRC client for Macs.

THIS MONTH'S HAPPENING SITES

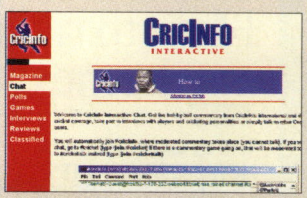
Explore some of the subjects featured in this month's *the net*...

Online gamers seeking similar should download Arcade (***www.gamespyarcade.com***).

Dents on your **credit card**? Try chatting with shopaholics at ***ukonlineshop.about.com***

Freezone's chat rooms (***chat.free-zone.com***) are always monitored, making them a safe place for kids.

Whatever your taste in films, you'll find a chat room at ***www.the chatdirectory.com/movie-chat.html***



Bemoan the latest English collapse with like-minded **cricket fans** at ***www-usa.cricket.org***.

Talk perennials and borders with fellow green fingers ***www.maigold.co.uk/chat.htm***

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The new of the Int

With the always-on, fast mobile Internet upon us, we look at

You stand on the train platform and scan the sea of heads. Only a few months ago, a good number would have had mobile phones pressed to their ears. But now the faces are down, studying intently the...well, you can't quite make out what among the sea of brollies and coats.

You battle through the throng to get a closer look. These individuals still have what look like mobile phones, only the screens are larger and in colour. In place of talking, the users are tapping on keypads, and judging by full-blown Web pages glowing from some of the screens, they're not just bashing out SMS greetings.

AvantGo: grabs page 'clippings'

Welcome to the world of GPRS and the always-on mobile Internet, coming to a mobile phone near you soon. So soon, in fact, that the first consumer services are only a month or two from going live. And around the same time, you'll see the next generation of mobiles showcased in high street windows.

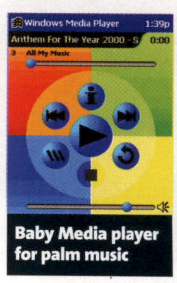
By the end of the year, the tap to the mobile Internet will be full on, with the choice of a host of handsets and connection packages. And if you take an optimistic view, you're then only a further 12 months away from full 3G (third generation) mobile telephony, with data being whizzed around at giddy speeds of up to 2MBps (the Japanese, typically, get it at the end of this year).

For now, the halfway house that is GPRS promises much. If you're one of the many thousands to have turned on and then turned away from WAP because of its tedious dial-up process and slow page downloads, General Packet Radio Services may be the answer to your prayers.

For one, there is no dial-up; you are permanently connected to the Internet. And then there's the speed issue: today, your WAP-enabled GSM mobile phone receives data at around 9.6kbps, which by any standards is yawn-inducing, but GPRS is capable of 56kbps, the speed of your desktop PC modem. However, whether it achieves those speeds only the coming months will tell. Many of the mobile makers have been quick to revise their optimistic initial estimates for GPRS, and some now quote 28kbps as a realistic up/download speed.

Pocket Explorer: Microsoft's big push for wireless domination

The likes of Vodafone, Orange and One2One have yet to announce pricing for the service, but don't expect a flat-rate subscription fee along the lines of unmetered Internet access. No, this will be pay-as-you-go, with the mobile surfers coughing up for the bytes they access, something which a small band of business users have been doing since summer of 2000.



Baby Media player for palm music

The phone companies point to the fact that you don't pay for what you haven't used; if you have a message in your inbox, it's up to you whether to read it or leave it. Of course, everything here hangs on how much is charged for the chunks

THE ROAD TO THE FAST MOBILE INTERNET

JULY 2001 »
First mobile telephony service providers, including Vodafone, begin the GPRS push to UK Internet users. Coincides with release of first handsets.

SEPTEMBER 2001 »
Nokia throws its weight behind GPRS with the release of new range of handsets, including the 8310 (see overleaf).

DECEMBER 2001 »
3G offering up to 2MBps goes live in Japan – maybe.

SPRING 2003 »
3G goes live in the UK, with speeds of between 384kbps and 2MBps available through mobile handsets. UK Internet users ditch PCs into skips en masse.

face ernet

what to buy and why

of data. Too much and the mobile industry's £75bn investment (yes, you read right) in 3G technology and infrastructure could come to nothing. And if you've read the financial press recently, you'll know what that could do to share prices.

But the potential of the new technology is undeniably huge. You will at last be able to access the information you want instantaneously. As transmission speeds increase, so the prospect of sending snaps to friends on a whim across the other side of the globe becomes a reality. Already, Ericsson is teasing the world with a mini digital camera that snaps on to its new R520 GPRS phone; grab a snap, send it over the Net from wherever you are to whoever you wish, in seconds.

Pocket Explorer: in colour, no less

It's worth saying at this stage, however, that the majority of the first wave of GPRS handsets on sale this year feature screens that are little larger than today's. In fact, most promise an experience that's little evolved from WAP; simple text links and no graphics (hardly surprising when most use WAP browsers).

There are, of course, alternatives. For while the new mobile phones begin to sport slightly larger screens, PDAs are now beginning to sport mobile telephony. The advantages here are obvious: the bigger screen means more text on view, making

messages and pages easier to read. Add colour into the mix (which more are now doing – see Compaq's iPAQ, the beauty on this month's cover) and you have the potential for the 'real' Web in your pocket. Of course, there is the small matter of a browser to render the pages through. And that's where a battle is shaping up between the likes of Microsoft's Pocket Internet Explorer, AvantGo (Palm's browser of choice) and Handspring's Blazer (again using the Palm OS).

Microsoft will point to the baby Explorer's compliance with a wide range of Web standards (so you're more likely to view pages in all of their correct glory), while AvantGo has the advantage of being able to run on both Pocket PC and Palm OS – and right now, Palm has the upper hand over Microsoft in terms of European PDA sales and popularity. As we went to press, AvantGo announced the release of v4.0 of its software, which the company claims to be optimised for wireless uses.

The outcome of this battle will be dictated by the expectations of the new wireless generation. If they want a shrunk-wrapped replica of their PC desktop Web experience, then Microsoft will win out (aside from the fact that the company has powerful software bundling deals that have spread Pocket IE's word). But if they want a simpler vision of the Web in a clever package with which they're already familiar (and AvantGo is hugely popular, particularly in the US), then Microsoft's upstart rival may win the day.

Meanwhile, envisaging a world in which we indulge in multiplayer gaming on the bus, Motorola, Ericsson and Siemens are working on a common gaming platform for wireless devices, the aim being to provide developers with a standard to work towards, so giving them the sole job of making better games.

'Add colour, and you now have the real Web in your pocket...'

Fun aside, shopping is the most powerful potential use of GPRS. And for that to take off, you'll need to feel confident that the new wireless browsers are secure. By the time we reach full 3G 'devices' in 2003, they'll have the power and memory to handle industry-standard SSL (Secure Sockets Layer), the technology used in most of the secure shopping you do over the wired Internet today. Meanwhile, first-wave handsets such as the flagship R520 come with encrypted keys to guarantee the legitimate identity of the user.

But all of that is for now. Stare harder into the crystal ball and you enter Bill Gates' sci-fi world of .Net, a series of applications born for the wireless, instant Internet world. Microsoft claims it will make the Internet truly user-friendly. Imagine you're going on a trip and have booked a flight. MS's new HailStorm technology will figure out which calendaring service you use and (with your permission) update your diary. It'll even notify you if your flight is delayed, and warn the people that you're going to visit. Now we come to think about it, do we really want 3G at all...?

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

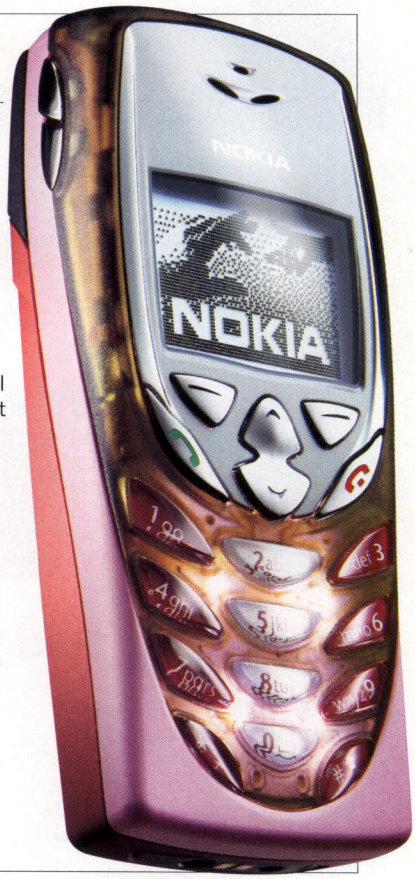
■ GPRS (GENERAL PACKET RADIO SERVICES)
Or 'Two and A Half G', as it is known among the tech community. GPRS is a packet-based data carrier for GSM networks. It promises a healthy 56kbps through an always-on connection, although the mobile industry has been keen of late to point out that the speed may be lower – 28kbps is widely quoted, with some even whispering that this could drop to as low as 13kbps (not far off a current GSM phone's speed of 9.6kbps).

■ 3G
The dream that will soon(ish) be a reality: transmission speeds of between 384kbps and 2MBps, accessible through an always-on mobile connection. Supposed to launch in faraway Japan by the end of the year, and with us early in 2003. The subject of a thousand concept products shown at the recent CeBIT in Germany.

■ HSCSD (HIGH SPEED CIRCUIT SWITCHED DATA)
Another 'high speed' data transmission technology, although this time making the most of existing GSM networks. Promises theoretical speeds of up to 57.6kbps, and is being touted by such major players as Ericsson and Nokia. Ideal for viewing Web pages with a high graphic content.

NOKIA 8310
GPRS, DUAL-BAND

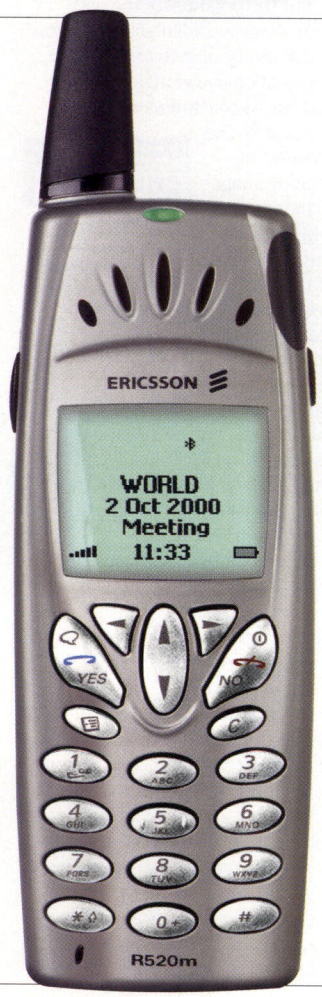
Weight: 84g
Size: 97 x 43 x 17mm
On sale: Autumn 2001



You've probably guessed by the size of the mono screen that Nokia's new style icon will not offer the most enriched Web experience. In fact, it offers pages through a WAP browser over GPRS, so it's text links and minimal graphics all the way, albeit without the painful dial-up process you endure today. And it must be said that the 8310's size weighs in its favour; a portable full-on Web browser is all well and good, but which pocket will it fit in? That aside, the style-conscious young things among you do get a host of snazzy snap-on covers (*sooo* important), and if that fails there's always the built-in FM radio to help while away the hours.

ERICSSON R520
GPRS, TRI-BAND

Weight: 105g
Size: 130 x 50 x 16mm
On sale: Summer 2001



Although a price has yet to be announced for Ericsson's new flagship, expect it to attract the kind of premium that may limit its appeal to real enthusiasts and business users. But what else would you expect, when the R520 comes packed with technology? Aside from being both tri-band and GPRS, it also includes Bluetooth (so it will be able to wirelessly communicate with compatible PCs, printers and headsets) and HSCSD (High Speed Circuit Switched Data), a technology that promises data transmission speeds of up to 38.4kbps over GSM networks. Add to that a built-in email client that will accept attachments, such as photos, via an infrared connection and you have a battleship of a mobile. It's just a shame that it comes with a standard, boring WAP browser.

SIEMENS SX45
GPRS, TRI-BAND

Weight: 'under 400g'
Size: N/A
On sale: October 2001

Say 'hello' to the Siemens stab at the phone-cum-PDA, the SX45, an altogether more conservative realisation of the wackily-styled concept 3G device of the same name shown by the German giant a while back. Primarily aimed at business users, the Siemens is a showcase for Microsoft's much-vaunted Stinger technology, and so unsurprisingly uses at its heart Pocket PC 3.0. However, while many of the first-wave GPRS units feature WAP only, the SX45 adds Pocket Internet Explorer into the mix, so you'll be able to view full Web pages, and in colour thanks to the TFT touch-screen (which, with 65,000 colours on tap, should do a good job of rendering ebooks). Even better, the PDA/phone has 32MB of memory to play with (plus a compact flash card slot), which opens the door to running bigger and more applications than lesser rivals. The inclusion of a slot for an MP3 player means you can take your music with you – which you can listen to via the stereo headset. For those of you who rightly worry about hackers, Siemens is quick to claim that the SX45 has excellent security software. Time, as they say, will tell.

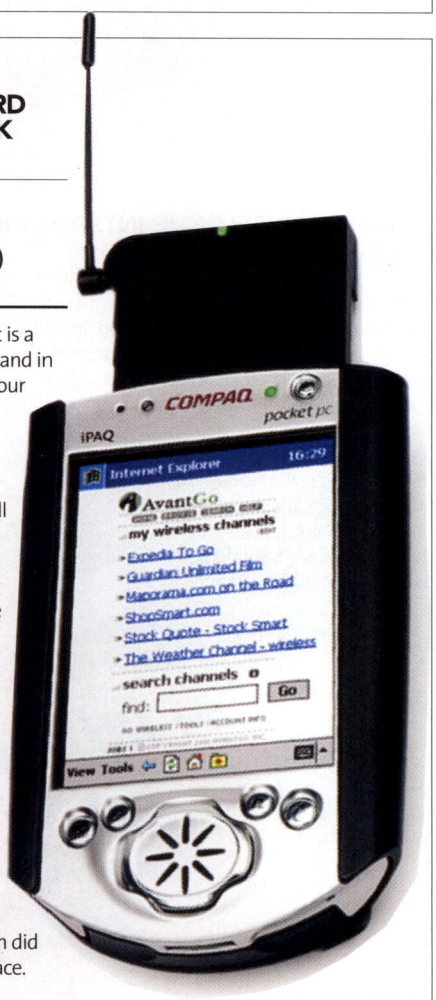
SAGEM WA3050
GPRS, DUAL BAND

Weight: 'under 200g'
Size: N/A
On sale: Summer 2001

Expected to cost the best part of £600 and on sale 'soon' (it was originally due to be in UK High Street stores by Christmas of last year) the 3050 is the shiny lovechild of Microsoft and a major French phone manufacturer. Similar to the much-publicised Trium Mondo in style, the 16MB PDA/phone uses Microsoft Windows CE 3.0 at its heart, and connects to the world via both GPRS and GSM. Surfers on the go will be delighted to hear that it offers Pocket Internet Explorer alongside a WAP browser, so at least you'll be able to see something resembling the real Web, although your whoops of joy may lose some of their fervour when you realise that the screen is monochrome.

COMPAQ IPAQ HP3660 + PC CARD EXPANSION PACK
GSM, DUAL-BAND

Weight: 170g
Size: 130 x 83.5 x 15.9mm (without Expansion Pack)
On sale: Now



OK, so it's not GPRS, but it is a way to go wireless today and in a very useable package. Your £470, colour, 64MB iPAQ comes with Windows CE and therefore Pocket Internet Explorer. If you want to see the Web in all of its glory, or just grab a few emails, you just need to invest in a PC Card Expansion Pack complete with its own battery power (around £90 inc VAT) and the Compaq 56k modem flash card (say farewell to another £115). The hitch? The Pack is bulky, adding some 50 percent to the weight of the 3660, and the price is high – but then you're buying the product whose style has done for Pocket PCs what the Palm did for the PDA is the first place.

MOTOROLA ACCOMPLI 008
GPRS, DUAL-BAND

Weight: 155g
Size: 98 x 60 x 28mm
On sale: July 2001

Billed as the 'ultimate in communications gadgetry', the 008 made its debut to a chorus of 'oohs' and 'aahs' at the recent CeBIT consumer electronics show in Germany. The natural successor to the company's innovative V100 (you know, the phone that flipped open to reveal a keyboard and screen), it brings together the large screen of a PDA with a flip-top mobile phone, and although details of the operating system were vague as we went to press, you can be assured that the 008's personal organiser functions will synch with your PC and 'other devices' (again vague, but it apparently works with Palm OS). Expect it to support GPRS/WAP, along with the obligatory SMS text capability. As for its dull if practical aspects, Motorola claims 90-145 hours of standby and 160-270 minutes of talk time. Suffice to say that we'd like one now, please.

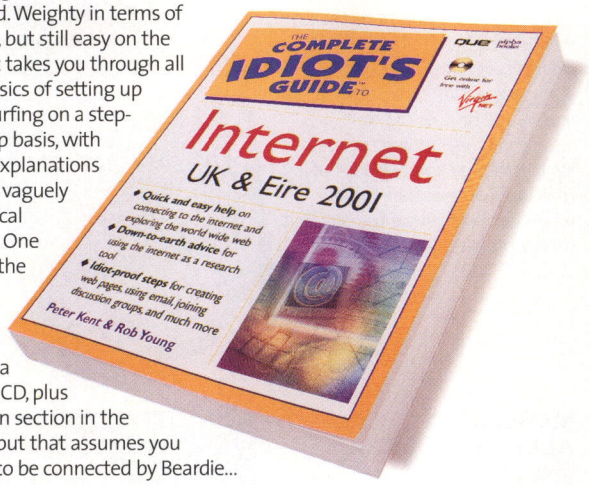
Help is at hand

Hundreds of books promise to make surfing easier – but do any of them actually deliver? Read on...

COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE TO THE INTERNET £11.99

PETER KENT & ROB YOUNG/Pearson Education Limited ★★★

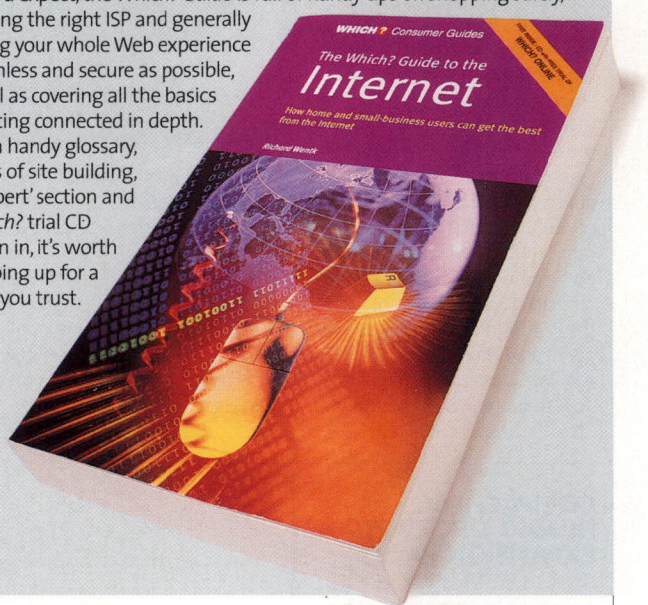
Dummies and Idiots' guides are all the rage, but if you can ignore the inherent insult involved in the title, *The Complete Idiot's Guide* is one of the most accessible and easy-to-use of the general Internet how-tos around. Weighty in terms of words, but still easy on the eyes, it takes you through all the basics of setting up and surfing on a step-by-step basis, with clear explanations of any vaguely technical terms. One gripe: the £11.99 price comprises a Virgin CD, plus a Virgin section in the book, but that assumes you want to be connected by Beardie...



THE WHICH? GUIDE TO THE INTERNET £8.79

RICHARD WENTK/Which? Ltd ★★★★

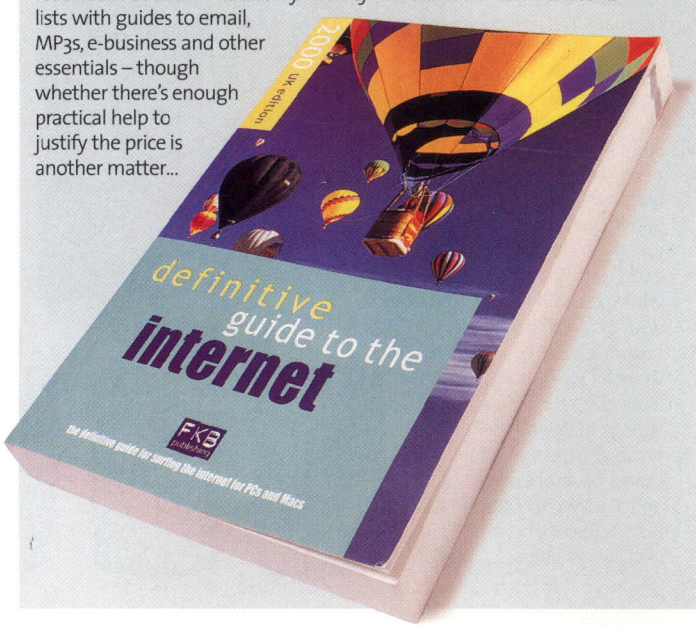
Trust the good old Consumers' Association to come up with the goods. As you'd expect, the *Which? Guide* is full of handy tips on shopping safely, choosing the right ISP and generally making your whole Web experience as painless and secure as possible, as well as covering all the basics of getting connected in depth. With a handy glossary, details of site building, an 'expert' section and a *Which?* trial CD thrown in, it's worth stumping up for a name you trust.



DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE INTERNET £7.99

PAUL BARTLETT/FKB Publishing Ltd ★★★

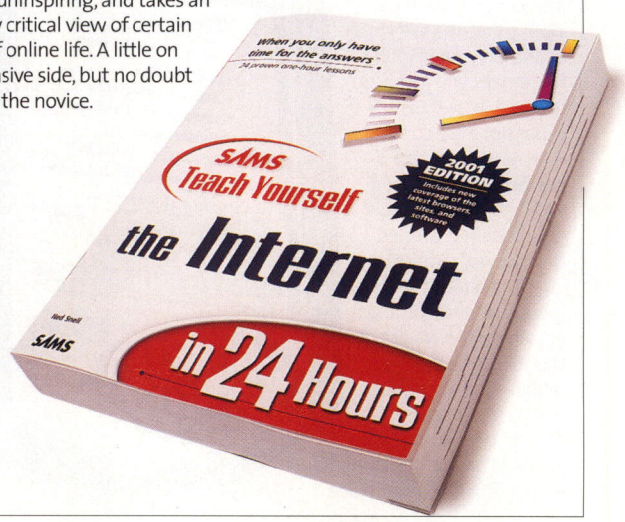
Books that simply serve as a massive directory of listings tend to be a largely pointless exercise: after all, most online directories (or reputable Net magazines...) carry handy checklists of the best sites, so a quickly-redundant book isn't necessary. The *Definitive Guide* thus balances its lists with guides to email, MP3s, e-business and other essentials – though whether there's enough practical help to justify the price is another matter...



TEACH YOURSELF THE INTERNET IN 24 HOURS

£11.60 NED SNELL/Sams Publishing ★★★

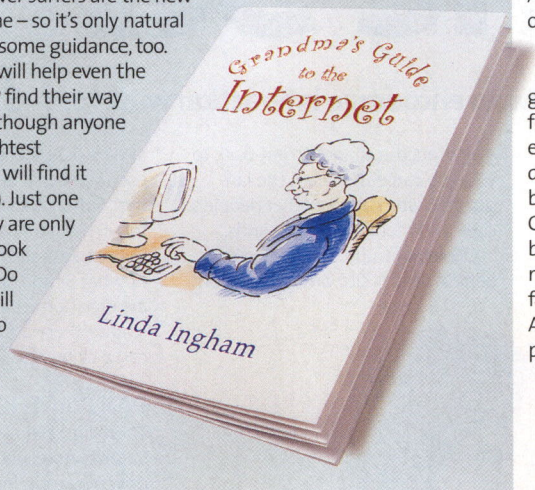
Quite whether you'd want to learn how to use the Web in one 24-hour block is open to debate – just imagine the sleep deprivation, for starters. Snell is, fortunately, sensible enough to suggest you delve into his tome in one-hour chunks, following the lessons covering browsers, sites, software and more. It's all instantly accessible, if a little uninspiring, and takes an admirably critical view of certain aspects of online life. A little on the expensive side, but no doubt useful for the novice.



GRANDMA'S GUIDE TO THE INTERNET £2.95

LINDA INGHAM/Willow Island Editions ★★★

As we all know, silver surfers are the new big spenders online – so it's only natural they should need some guidance, too. *Grandma's Guide* will help even the most Luddite OAP find their way around the Web (though anyone with even the slightest knowledge of PCs will find it hilariously simple). Just one gripe though: why are only Explorer and Outlook Express covered? Do grannies all love Bill Gates? We need to be told...



THE GOOD WEB GUIDES Prices Vary

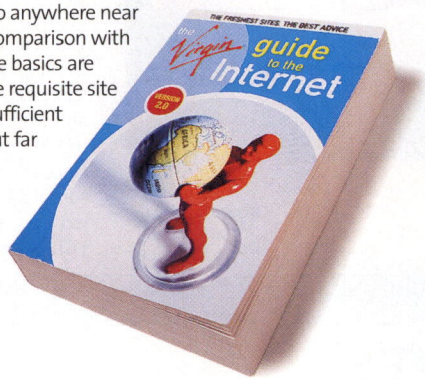
VARIOUS AUTHORS/The Good Web Guide Ltd ★★★★

A clever idea this: *Good Web Guides* focus on sites which excel in various fields, and devote two pages of their handily-sized guides to each, reviewing and fully rating them with an expert's eye. It's perfect for delving into, or for keeping by your side, while you surf. Collecting the set will set you back a bit, but if you're a devotee of games, music, travel or, erm, sex, you can't go far wrong with an individual tome. Around 15 new guides are in the pipeline, so keep your eyes peeled...

THE VIRGIN GUIDE TO THE INTERNET 2.0 £4.79

SIMON COLLIN/Virgin Publishing Ltd ★★

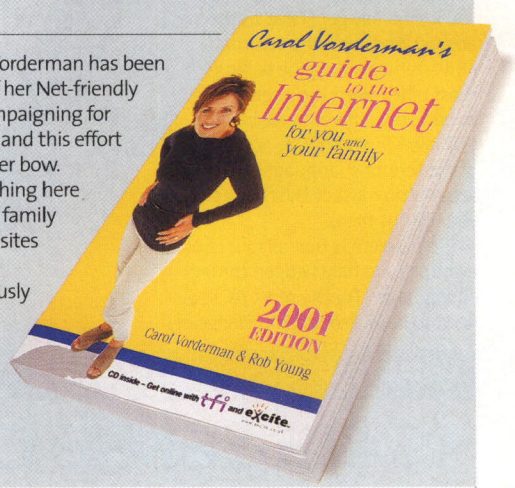
Virgin are following hot on the heels of the Rough Guides with their all-encompassing how-to: sadly, this pocket-sized surfer's manifesto doesn't go into anywhere near enough detail to stand comparison with its better-known rival. The basics are covered and there are the requisite site listings, but nothing of sufficient depth. A decent effort, but far from spectacular.



CAROL VORDERMAN'S GUIDE TO THE INTERNET FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY £7.99

CAROL VORDERMAN & ROB YOUNG/Prentice Hall ★★★★

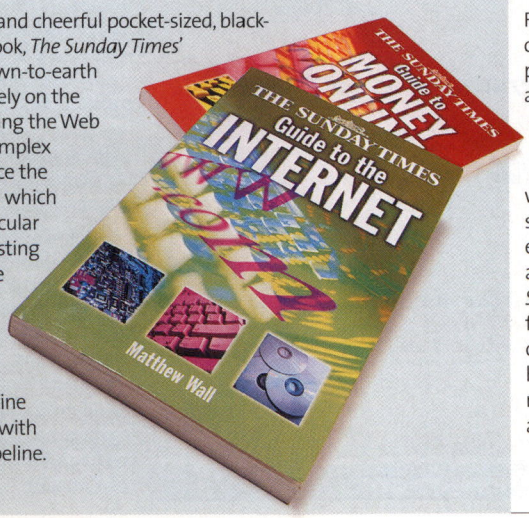
The omnipresent Ms Vorderman has been making a great deal of her Net-friendly credential recently, campaigning for greater safety online – and this effort is the latest string to her bow. As you'd expect, everything here is geared towards safe family surfing, with plenty of sites and chatting tips, all presented in a ridiculously simple, easily understandable fashion. Go on – trust Carol with your cash...



THE SUNDAY TIMES GUIDE TO THE INTERNET £5.59

MATTHEW WALL/HarperCollins Publishers ★★★★

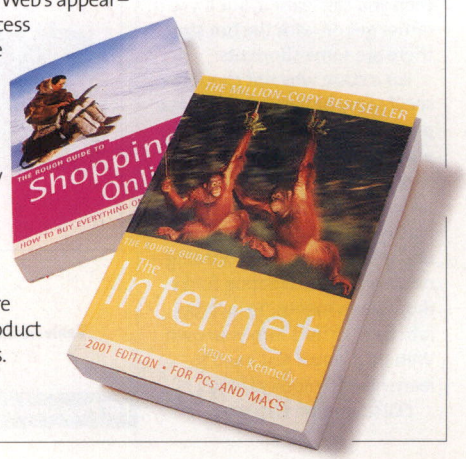
A relatively cheap and cheerful pocket-sized, black-and-white handbook, *The Sunday Times'* effort is chatty, down-to-earth and focuses squarely on the practicalities of using the Web rather than the complex technicalities, hence the handy lists of sites which excel in their particular fields. If jargon-busting is important, these are well worth considering. Similar guides to money, shopping and education online are also available, with holidays in the pipeline.



THE ROUGH GUIDE TO THE INTERNET £4.80

ANGUS J KENNEDY/Rough Guides Ltd ★★★★★

Fact: *The Rough Guide to The Internet* was outsold only by the Bible last year. Proof, if proof were needed, of the Web's appeal – and testament to the success of the pocket-sized online guide, which mixes expert insight, clear writing and the best sites in one informative, entertaining and instantly accessible whole. The *Shopping Online* guide, for the same price, carries on where the main guide leaves off, with online store reviews by category of product and general shopping tips.



WORDS: SHAWNA NOBLE; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT; ALL PRICES STATED ARE FROM **www.amazon.co.uk**, MINUS P&P, OR FROM **www.studentbookworld.co.uk**

Follow the Script

Continuing our Web design series with a look at how to encourage interaction with your visitors

IT'S THREE MONTHS INTO OUR series of updates to the site we've built with TV starlet Sarah Cawood (***www.sarahcawood.net***) and the visitors are flooding in.

With some of the glitzier aspects of the home page out of the way, it's time to get interactive. One of the Internet's key strengths is its potential as a communication tool – in Sarah's case that can work both ways, with communication from her to her fans and vice versa. The key to encouraging people to get involved is to use a little bit of scripting magic.

WHAT'S THE CODE?

Ask most people what language they think powers the Web and you'll probably get HTML as the answer. And while it's true that HTML remains the glue behind most of the Web, the engine is likely to be a very different beast – ASP, CGI, JavaScript and XML are just four of the scripting languages that actually do most of the flashy stuff you see out there.

The problem is that all four of our examples are fully-fledged computer languages. For the most part you need to have a sound knowledge of programming to make use of those languages. There are two solutions to this dilemma if you want to include some extra code in your own Web pages, to allow you to easily add simple updates and to give users the chance to get back to you: you can either learn the language or you can use other people's code and modify it to your ends.

Obviously, Sunstream, the outfit behind Sarah's site, are a professional Web design company and they use their own code. Their programmer, Simon Williams, is responsible for all the hard code that powers Sunstream's sites. And, while most of what Simon does is out of the average home page designer's league, there are plenty of tips we can pick up along the way.

Sarah: keen on interaction

PAIN IN THE ASP

There are several sections of Sarahcawood.net which will be driven by code, including the news/events section and the feedback form. The ASP code, programmed by Simon, sits between you and the Web server on one side and an ordinary Microsoft Access database on the other. As and when traffic picks up, and Access can no longer cope, Sunstream plan to upgrade this to an SQL database. The first thing Simon does when creating the code for a site like Sarah's is to sit down with the team and work out the information they're going to need to collect. Once they have a good idea of the sort of data they'll be handling, they work out the logic of the process in Visio (***www.microsoft.com/office/visio***) –

WHAT DO ALL THOSE CODES MEAN?

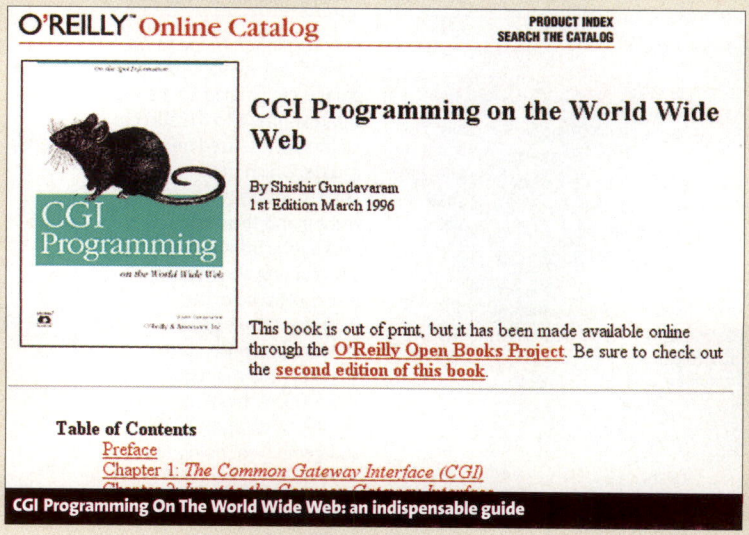
MAKE SENSE OF SCRIPT>>

If you've ever selected 'View Source' from your Web browser, then you'll know that HTML and all the Internet-based languages that hook into it, such as JavaScript and ASP, are pretty complicated. If you've got a good logical mindset, a small gift for maths and a bit of time then you can learn it, but if you'd rather get on with the fun stuff, there are some shortcuts.

For a start, why not check to see if some enterprising soul has programmed the effect you want already. There are thousands of public domain Javascripts floating around at places like *www.javascript.com*, doing everything from opening a new window to creating funky drop-down menus. To incorporate these scripts into your own Web page you'll just need to learn how to modify things.

CGI (Common Gateway Interface) is a hard-working and pliant little language that does a lot of common house-keeping-style tasks. If, for instance, you've ever clicked on a link that says 'Sign up for our newsletter' then the odds are there's a CGI script working in the background. You can find hundreds of pre-written scripts at CGIfiles (*www.cgifiles.com*) and if you'd like to learn the language then check out the online version of the book, CGI Programming on the World Wide Web (*www.oreilly.com/openbook/cgi*).

The fact is that CGI, ASP, JavaScript and the rest of the programming languages can be very tricky to get your head around. And so, while HTML isn't strictly speaking a programming language (it's literally a 'mark-up' language) it's a good way to learn some programming conventions and terms and start dealing with that thorny issue of logic before you get stuck into the hard stuff. If you choose to at all, that is...


O'REILLY™ Online Catalog

PRODUCT INDEX
SEARCH THE CATALOG

CGI Programming on the World Wide Web

By Shishir Gundavaram
1st Edition March 1996

This book is out of print, but it has been made available online through the O'Reilly Open Books Project. Be sure to check out the second edition of this book.

Table of Contents

Preface
Chapter 1: *The Common Gateway Interface (CGI)*

CGI Programming On The World Wide Web: an indispensable guide

Improving individual sections is easy with use of proper scripting tools

Up-to-date: Sarah's scripts allow her to input details of personal appearances

a charting package that enables the team to plan the flow of data through the code.

Once the logic's in place it's time to create the tables in Access that will receive all this information. The ASP code that acts as the bridge between that Access database and the user at the Web page comes next. And finally, with all the tricky stuff out of the way, the whole thing can be laid up into HTML, before having the design wrapped round it.

Sarah's site neatly shows the power of databases

TWO-WAY STREET

Sarah's site actually neatly demonstrates the power of databases, because there's a two-way flow of information on different sections. In the newsletter section, information flows from you, the end user, into the database where it's collated by Sunstream. However, in the news/events section, the database is filled up from Sunstream's end and the ASP code draws on that data to serve up a Web page detailing what Sarah's going to be up to in the coming month, with info on TV and personal appearances.

As Simon points out, it's entirely possible to use something as simple as a freely-available CGI script (Formmail is the most popular) to capture user information, but if it's captured in a database format then it's far easier to manipulate and do clever things with.

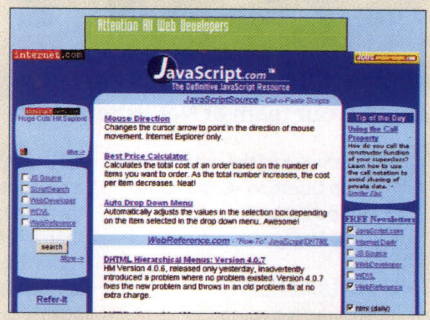
If you don't fancy learning a programming language, then fear not; many Web servers work through Microsoft FrontPage extensions support, which enables mere mortals to create funky features like feedback pages and message forums. However, if you fancy getting your hands dirty, then check out your local college for courses in C++, Java, ASP and SQL and you might even find a new career path...

SEE FOR YOURSELF AT
www.sarahcawood.net
Keep checking back for the latest developments

WHERE TO LEARN THE SCRIPT

EXTRA READING»

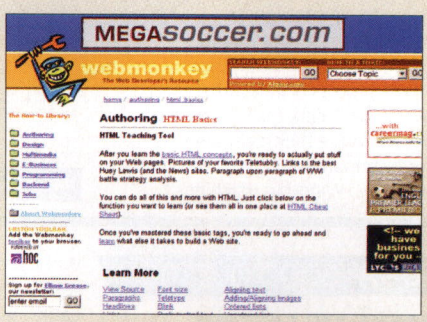
JAVASCRIPT
www.javascript.com
Huge scripting resource with thousands of freely downloadable scripts for your delectation



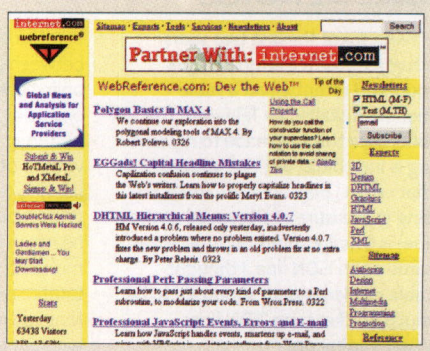
CGI
www.cgifiles.com
Not a shadowy government agency but a huge CGI resource with scripts for everything from auctions to classified advertisements

ASP
www.4guysfromrolla.com
Active Server Pages are everywhere – learn how to use this powerful language with help from the four guys

HTML
hotwired.lycos.com/webmonkey/teachingtool Why not start learning the HTML code that lurks beneath your Web pages?



REFERENCE
www.webreference.com
If it all gets a bit much, check out this excellent central reference site for tutorials, tips and general help.



Q&A

Whether it's a glitch in your software or a problem with your ISP, our team of Net experts have the answer to hand

The sender of the month's Good Question wins a Casio TV1800 Pocket Television, worth £129.99

THE ITALIAN JOB

My father, who is a computer novice, lives in Italy, and would like to buy a computer in the UK and take it back out with him when he returns. As he doesn't really need the Windows aspect of a computer, would an Internet TV serve his purpose? He needs to be able to access most search engines and university Web sites for research.

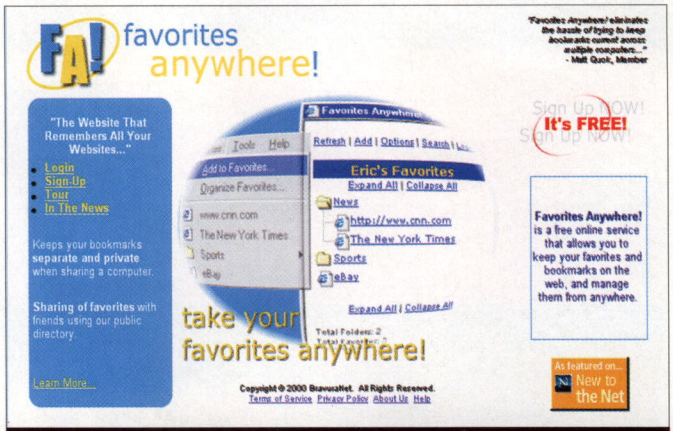
JAMES WISEMAN, VIA EMAIL

Internet TVs, such as the Bush range, as well as the services offered through digital TV providers, are great ways for novices to get online, but they're all designed for UK residents and won't connect from Italy. They also provide a 'cut-down' experience of surfing the Net – in other words, not all sites will be accessible. That means there's little alternative to buying a computer – and even if you do this in the UK your father is still going to have to sign up to an Italian ISP, so it might be easier to go through the whole process in Italy rather than over here. Finally, take a look at buying an iMac – they really are easier for technophobes to get up and running than Windows machines.

MY FAVOURITE OPERA

It's quite recently that I discovered there were in fact browsers other than Internet Explorer out there. I particularly like Opera and have decided to use this as my main Web browser. However, I have a small problem with this otherwise excellent program that I'm hoping you can help me solve. I have about 300 favourite sites bookmarked in Internet Explorer and I'd like to transfer them across to Opera 5. Is there a simple way of doing it, as I don't really relish moving them by hand?

STEWART THOMAS, DUNDEE



Favourites Anywhere: a great way to, er, take your favourites anywhere

Don't panic! One solution is to upload your favourites to a Web page – useful if you travel around, because you can always get to them from any machine or Internet café. Take a look at ***www.favoritesanywhere.com*** and see if you like the idea. More to the point, the latest version of Opera, 5.0 fully supports Explorer favourites – and it's free. For more information see ***www.opera.com***.

ON THE JOB

I'm currently looking for a new job, and several firms' Web sites have asked me to send my CV as an attachment to their online form. How do I do this? Is there an easier way of creating a CV than using Word?

IAN TOMLINSON, VIA EMAIL

When you create an email, it doesn't have to consist solely of the words making up the message itself. You can also append existing files from your computer's hard drive, which are then attached to the message – look for the 'attachment' command within your email software. More and more companies are asking for candidates' CVs as attachments, as it cuts down on their paperwork and filing. There's another, hidden, reason to all this, however: as PCs become increasingly central to the workplace, employers are looking for computer-literate staff – which means that not screwing up this simple request will win you plenty of brownie points. Microsoft Word is pretty much endemic in modern offices, so you can be confident that your possible future employer will be able to read your CV.

If using any other word processing software, however, it's best to save the file as text-only – a universally readable '.txt' document. Some other, flashier, alternatives are to use Adobe Acrobat to create a 'pdf' file complete with pretty fonts and embedded graphics, or write your CV in HTML – the language used to create Web pages, read-

iMacs: technophobe friendly

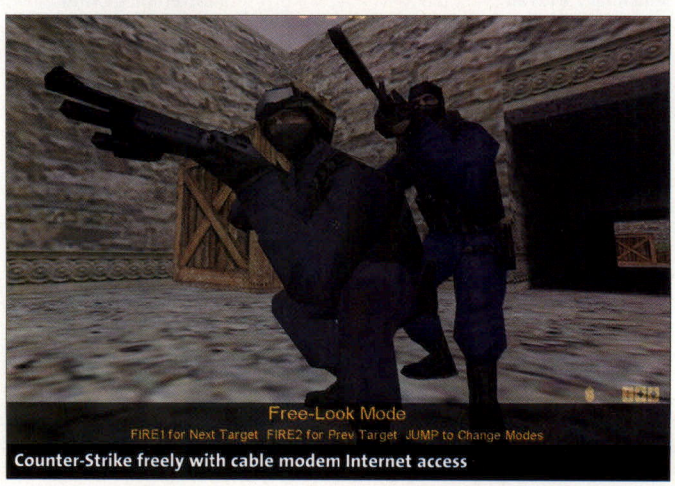
Q&A GOOD QUESTION

MAKE ME FASTER!

Having spent the last two years struggling with a wretched 56k modem, I recently had a cable modem installed by Telewest. The difference this has made to my surfing is incredible, but I've noticed that when I play Counter-Strike, my ping (a measure of the speed of the line) is usually about 60 to 70 – the same as an ISDN line. I thought cable modems were supposed to be much quicker than ISDN lines. What's going on?

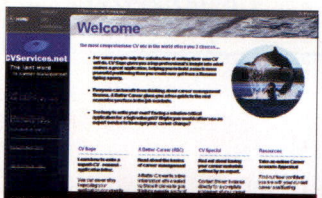
GARY WOODWARD, CHELTENHAM

With ISDN, you get a dedicated line with the same speed, day or night. Cable modems work differently: the exchange parcels off a hunk of bandwidth which is then shared between all the cable modem users online at one time. If you're the only one using the service, you get blistering speed; if you're sharing with 10 other users, you might only get one-tenth of the bandwidth. With cable modems being rare beasts in this country at the moment, most users are getting a terrific service. However, it might be that you're in a part of the country where there's an unusually high concentration of users.



Counter-Strike freely with cable modem Internet access

able by any browser. You could even put a multimedia presentation together in Shockwave – it's the first thing Web designers need to do to be taken seriously these days. None of these methods are 'easier' than Word, mind you. If you need more help, take a look at a specialist CV creation Web site, such as ***www.cvservices.net***.



CV Services: landing you the job?

DON'T STOP THE ROCK

I know it's cheesy, but I have music on my site in the 'm3u' format. But when I log on from my other computer, at work, I cannot play the tunes. Any suggestions?
RICCARDO GIUSEPPE VERRECCHIA, VIA EMAIL

M3us are simple text commands that tell plug-ins like the Windows Media Player to find and play a full-fat MP3 file. You can open them up in a text editor, like the Notepad, and see what 'path' they specify to the home of the original MP3 files. What I bet is happening is that your existing m3u paths are pointing to files on your home machine. When you log on from home, your browser finds the MP3s on your hard disk and plays them, but obviously this won't be possible from your work machine. The answer is to keep all your MP3s housed on your Web site, then to create new m3us from them. To check you've done it right, open up the files in the Notepad – the paths should all point to 'http://', not to the 'C' drive.

SHAMELESS PLUGS

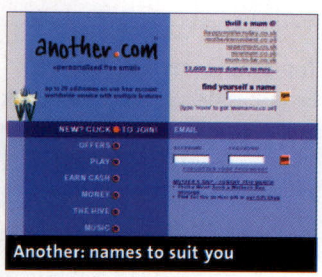
What on Earth is a 'plug-in'? I recently visited a Web site that said it required something called QuickTime and that I should download the plug-in. Is this going to mess up my PC?
TERESA WOOLDRIDGE, RYDE

Plug-ins are clever bits of code that add extra functions to your existing browser software. They're typically written and updated by third parties – that is, they don't come as part of the standard package from Microsoft, Netscape or whoever. If you come across a Web page that requires you to have a copy of a specific plug-in, one of two things will happen: you'll either be notified (as happened to you with QuickTime, which is a video and audio player used by many sites), or that great clip of a whale being blown up simply won't play. Whichever is the case, don't be afraid to download plug-ins as they're offered to you; if the worst comes to the worst and one of them crashes your browser, simply locate the plug-ins folder on your computer, open it up, trash the offending piece of software and you should be fine. All plug-ins which your browser points you to will be created and updated by reputable companies, so there's no need to worry about their origins.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

I have a very small home-based flower therapy business and want a domain name to use as a permanent email address – one that won't change if I switch ISPs. I don't want a Web page just yet and need to keep costs down. I know I have to pay for the name, which is a two-year fee, then pay an annual fee on top of that for mail forwarding. But I don't really understand how this works. Is there an inexpensive service for those like me who only want the domain name and no Web space? Or is there an ISP suited to my needs?
ELLIE WEB, VIA EMAIL

One solution might be to use a specialist email forwarder. These are companies that have bought a whole bunch of domain names, then 'rent' out email addresses for them, forwarding mail to your existing account. The good news is that they're cheap –subscriptions start from upwards of a fiver a year, and many are completely free. The bad news is that you're limited to the domains they have to offer. Try ***www.another.com***, which has a whole mess of funky addresses, or log on to Streetnames (***www.streetnames.com***); the latter controls the rights to a load of, er, street names. Do bear in mind that if you become well known by your Streetname or Another email address, and subsequently decide to put up a Web site with the same name, your domain will already have been reserved by your email forwarder, and others will be using it so it won't be uniquely yours. So it might be best to bite the bullet and register your business right now.



Another: names to suit you

QUICK QUESTION TIME. FINGERS ON THE BUZZERS...

FAQs

>Can you advise of any ISPs offering unmetered access not tied to a phone company? I travel and stay with friends and family, so 0800 access would be ideal for me.
MALCOLM FRASER, VIA EMAIL

Just one year ago, you could have chosen from half a dozen ISPs offering not only 0800 access, but no subscription charges either. However, with the recent fall-off in online advertising – which was crucial to these services' profitability – they've pretty much gone to the wall. Factor in the way that the new breed of unmetered subscription services operate (they need to buy 'blocks' of phone time from telecommunications companies, meaning you're typically required to dial in via that phone provider) and the roving surfer looking to make

NGUK: 0800 access – not just for gamers...

free calls from any phone in the UK has few options. But at least one ISP meets your needs: for £25 a month, you can dial an 0800 number and get online with NGUK (***www.nguk.net***). It's actually a specialist ISP for gamers, but NGUK will be delighted to take your money whatever your reasons for getting online.

>I'm trying to save my favourites onto a floppy. I've done this before, but can't remember how!
ANDY, VIA EMAIL

Simply launch Explorer and use the 'Export Favorites' command to save the lot onto a disk. A useful piece of favourites management software is Favtool, available as a free download from ***www.microsoft.com***. Just search the site to find the version compatible with your system.

>I work part-time for a well known telecommunications company and spend the rest of the time writing. I really like the Internet and began to realise that words are what make people come back to a site again and again. I write a fictitious diary of a customer service advisor for BT which is published on the Intranet, and would like to get into writing for the the 'real' Net. Any ideas as to where to start?
RICHARD PAGE, VIA EMAIL

You don't mention whether you hope to get paid for your comedy stylings, Richard. If you don't, you'll have a lot more choice and freedom. If you do, then good luck, because there are thousands of people out there chasing after the small amount of money actually available to writers. Let's assume that getting paid is a medium- to long-term goal for you; that means your short-term goal is to find an audience. Start by putting your work online: most ISPs offer free Web space, and look to back issues of *the net* for advice on how to construct a simple site. Upload your diary every week, archiving past entries on the site.

Email the Web masters of comedy sites and offer an I'll-link-to-your-site-if-you-link-to-mine arrangement – this is an extremely common online phenomenon. Contact sites that are used by the sort of audience who will best appreciate your telecoms-related humour – recruitment agencies, trade magazines, hardware specialists, industry pundits – and ask if they want to 'carry' your column, or at least point their users in the direction of your home page. Encourage feedback via email or a message board on your site. Subscribe to every comedy or telecoms newsgroup you can find, post to them regularly and put your site's

Microsoft: source of free software

URL in your signature line. It'll take time – you might spend years in the wilderness – but if you're funny, and persistent, and committed, you might get into a position where someone offers to buy your words. And at last you'll be able to give up the day job and starve like the rest of us. Good luck!

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Over 500,000 Sites Hosted
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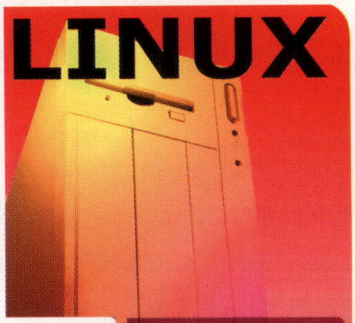

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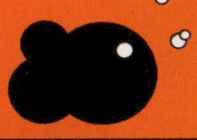

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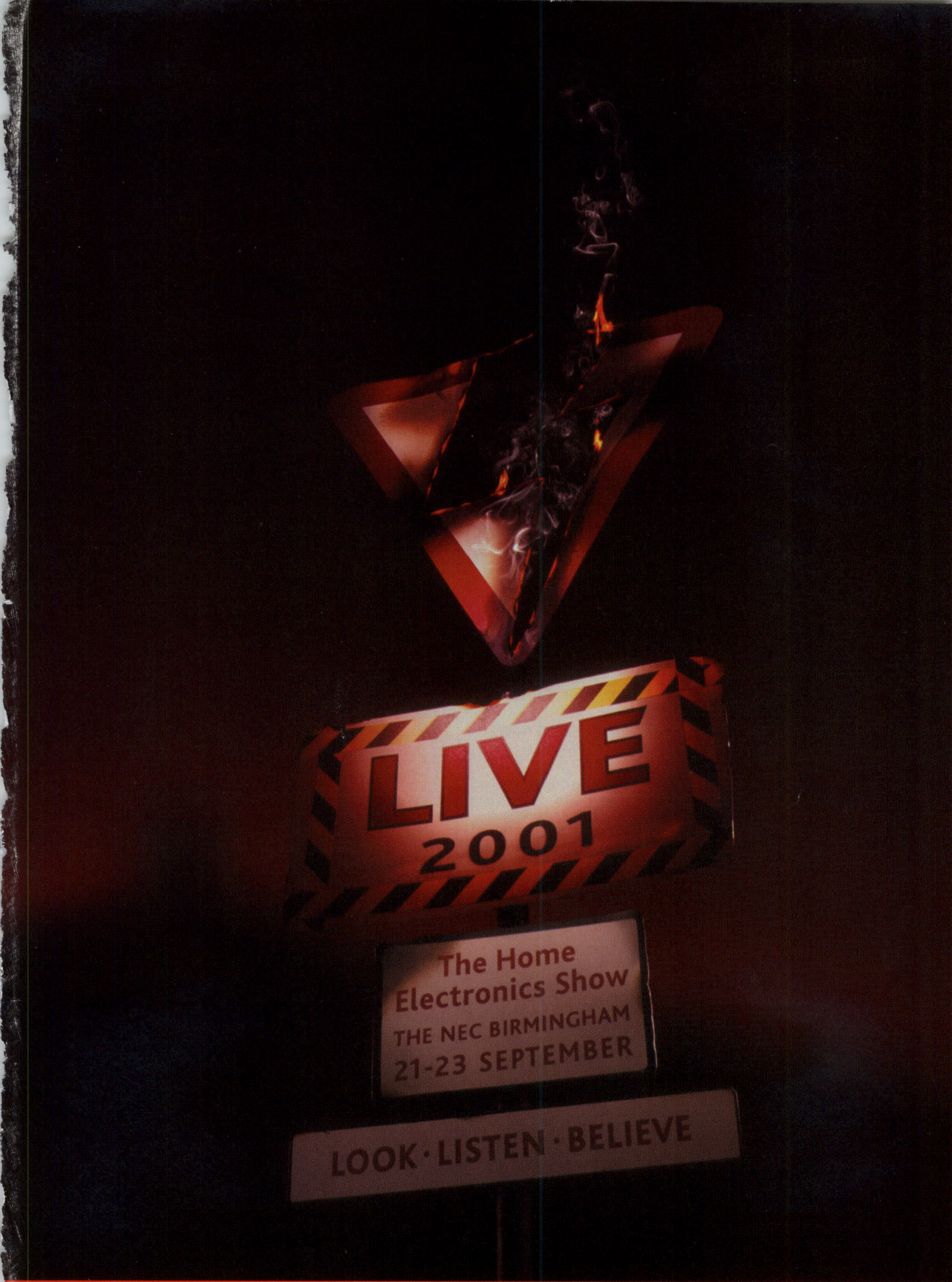

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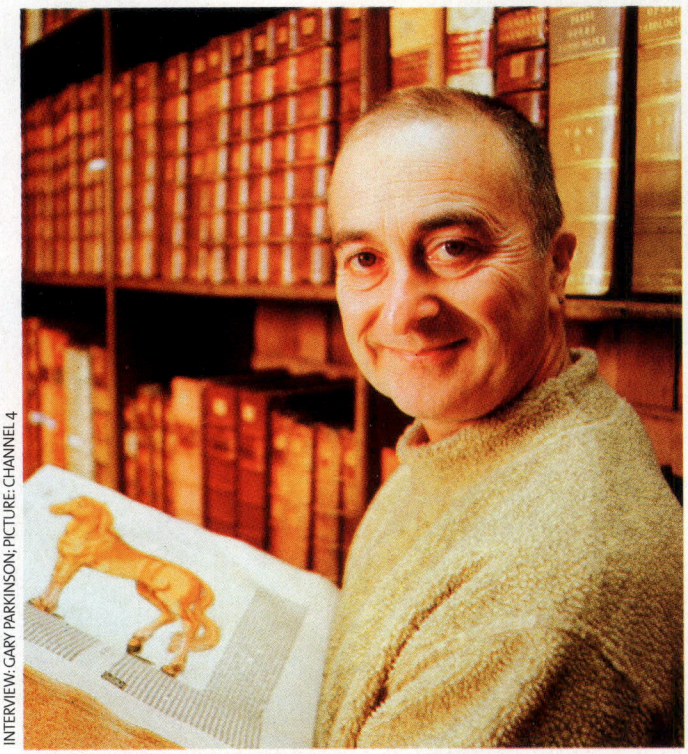


INTERVIEW: GARY PARKINSON; PICTURE: CHANNEL 4

Tony Robinson

The former Baldrick, *Maid Marian* writer and now *Time Team* presenter digs for gems on the Net

When did you discover the Internet?
For my own use, fairly recently. It always felt to me like a technology which was hyped massively but no one really knew what to do with it for the best; there's a part of me that still thinks that's the case. But whatever other advantages it's got, I suddenly realised that it could completely smash the great invisible wall which exists in television between those who make programmes and those who watch them.

So how did Time Team become one of C4's most popular sites?
I've always been very keen that the site should be as contemporary and as accessible as possible, and each year there is more input. Some of the film that was shot specifically for the Web site was later used in the programme.

Have you met your Web public?
We booked an arts centre for *Time Team On The Road* and the audience was almost entirely made up of regular site users. It felt a bit like how the Open University used to be 20 years ago, when people would study alone and meet for fornication in the summer. I didn't actually see much fornication, though obviously I'll try to encourage it.

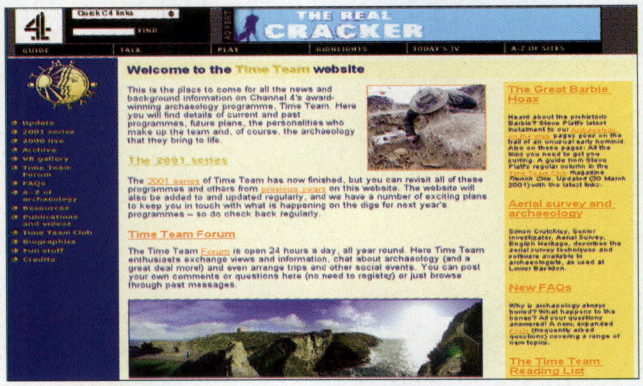
What else do you use the Net for?
As a writer I used to be massively reliant on the fax for exchanging ideas with writers and producers. I do virtually all of that via email now, although I have to say I find it harder to remember to check my email than my fax – when you walk into the room and there's a fallen fax page on the floor you can't ignore it.

If historical figures had their own Web sites, whose would you most want to read?
The Virgin Mary. What was she actually doing all that time?

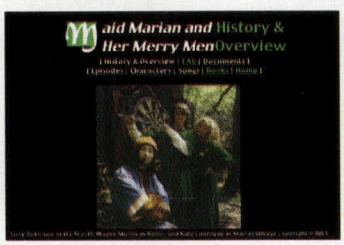
If you saw your head grafted onto a naked model's body on the Web, would you sue?
Yes, without any doubt at all. My biggest anxiety about new technologies is that the rights to an artist's work will be taken out of their hands. There's nothing that I would like less than a lot of artificially created, poorly written and conceived *Blackadders*, and unless there's some copyright control that's the world we're heading for – a world of shabby mediocrity.

Will future archaeologists be digging up MP3 players and iMacs?
No, I think they'll be digging up an awful lot of cow and sheep bones.

TONY'S PICK OF THE WEB



TIME TEAM ***www.channel4.com/nextstep/timeteam***
The award-winning archaeology challenge has spawned one of Channel 4's most-hit sites.



MAID MARIAN AND HER MERRY MEN WEBSITE
www.ecr.mu.oz.au/~bjev/marian
Tony's comic Robin Hood rewrite appealed to children and adults alike. 'After 10 years the BBC have decided to re-run it, starting 20 April at 5pm on BBC1!'

TOPSAIL DENMARK
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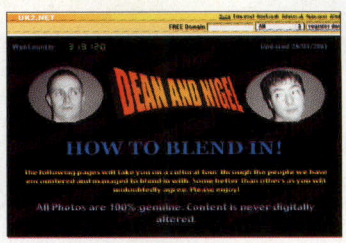
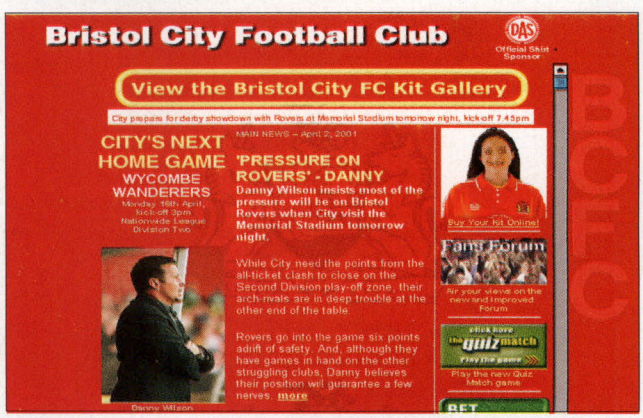
'It was a great holiday,' says Tony of his trip to the Danish island of Møn last Easter. Read his account of the trip on the tour operator's page.



HOW TO BLEND IN
www.deanandnigel.com
'Guy de la Bedoyere, *Time Team*'s Roman expert, sent this. He said, "If you thought the true spirit of Britain was lost, take a look at this. It's both fabulously inspired and yet somehow futile".'



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